The IRON BOYS AS FOREMEN

JAMES R. MEARS

CHS (143) A

To Ned

From

Bob Rich

Rush Pointed to a Seam in the Rocks Overhead.

Frontispiece.

The Iron Boys as Foremen

OR

Heading the Diamond Drill Shift

By

JAMES R. MEARS

Author of The Iron Boys in the Mines, The Iron Boys on the Ore Boats, etc.

Illustrated

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The Iron Boys as Foremen

CHAPTER I

THE TRAGEDY IN THE SHAFT

"WHERE'S the cage?" asked Steve Rush.

"I guess it's waiting for a load at the surface," answered Bob Jarvis, listening at the shaft opening. "I don't hear it coming."

"Ring it down, Bob."

Young Jarvis gave the bell lever a pull. A second later the gong on that level rang sharply. A rush of air told them the steel cage was on its way down to the fifteenth level, where the young men were awaiting it. With a noisy clatter the cage came to a stop at the opening on that level; the iron guard bars fell back with a bang.

"All aboard," said Steve, standing aside that the five other men, all miners, waiting to be conveyed to the surface might step into the damp cage.

"You first," bowed Jarvis with mock politeness, waving Steve in ahead of him.

"Give them the signal, Bob," ordered Rush.

Clang, clang, clang, clang, clang! Five strokes rang out on the gong at the top of the shaft leading down into the mine, indicating to the cage-tender of the Red Rock Mine that his cage was coming up with a load of human freight. In other words, there were men on the cage, hence the steel elevator was to be raised with care.

Slowly, but steadily, gaining in speed as it ascended, lighted only by the faint glimmer of the tallow candles on the oilskin hats of the occupants, the cage rose toward the surface.

Steve Rush and Bob Jarvis had been inspecting the tracks in the Red Rock Mine and were now on their way to the surface for the purpose of going down in the Cousin Jack Mine, there to continue their work of inspection. A few seconds had passed when the cage began to sway from side to side.

Steve instinctively reached up and took hold of the safety rod that extended across the top of the cage.

"Hang on, Bob! We're going altogether too fast for comfort," warned Rush. "What ails that engineer up there? It looks as though he were trying to give us a shaking up."

"I'll shake him up when I get to the top," answered Bob with a growl, as he grasped the rod over his head for support.

The others on the car, all foreigners, were standing stolidly, not appearing to care one way or the other what happened. They were too used to riding up and down in the cage to and from their daily work to be greatly disturbed by the rough ride they were now taking.

Steve, however, knew full well that they were riding altogether too fast for safety. He was not afraid; his nerves were too steady for that. Nor was his companion, Bob Jarvis, the least bit worried, but he was growling at the cage-tender far above them for his roughness.

Suddenly there came a sound that startled all hands. It was a quick, crunching, grinding sound, followed by crash after crash of metal meeting metal.

"Hold fast," shouted Steve.

"What's happened, Steve?"

"The car's off the track! Look out everybody! We're in for trouble now."

No sooner had he spoken than the steel floor beneath their feet seemed to slip suddenly from under them.

"She's turning turtle!" cried Steve. "Hold fast!"

His warning had come too late. The miners

had been thrown from their feet to the floor of the cage. With quick instinct Steve, gripping the iron bar over his head, stretched his legs down full length. Bob's grip had been wrenched from the safety bar.

"Grab my feet, Bob!" Steve shouted at the top of his voice.

Bob Jarvis was a quick-witted boy as well. He fastened a firm grip on the ankles of his companion just as the floor of the cage began slipping from under him.

By this time the stolid foreigners were fully awake to the peril that confronted them. With cries that neither lad ever forgot, the men slipped from the cage that had turned turtle, plunging into the dark abyss, that quickly swallowed them up. There was one of the five miners, however, more quick of wit than his companions, who had also fastened to Steve's ankles. He and Bob Jarvis found themselves dangling in space while Steve, clinging to the iron cross bar above, was holding them up.

The two men were very much in each other's way, and the miner was fighting desperately to push Jarvis away down into the shaft.

"Quit that, you cowardly cur!" commanded the lad. "You'll have the three of us down if you don't look sharp. Steve, are you all right?"

"Yes, but be careful down there. Whom have you with you?"

"I don't know. He's a heathen—that's all I know about it."

"Me—me Dominick. Me——"

"So you're the loafer who tried to knife Steve that time when he saved you from being blown to the moon by dynamite? I ought to drop you, and I'll do it as sure as my name's Bob Jarvis if you don't stop your fighting. Steve, can you hold us?"

"I am afraid not for long," answered the plucky lad, who was supporting the two men by the sheer strength of his arms. "My arms are aching like a sore tooth, but I'll hold on till they come off. Don't make any more disturbance down there than you can help."

Bob groaned.

"We'll never make it. You can't hold on and bear our weight."

Steve's arms were growing numb. Fortunately he was possessed of great strength, and his present position was something like that of a bar performer's when about to attempt a giant swing. Had it not been for the great weight that he was supporting Steve could have held on indefinitely. As it was, he could not hope to cling to the bar much longer. The lad's mind was working rapidly. He was trying to plan

some way out of the predicament, some way that would save the lives of all three.

"Steve!"

"Yes?"

"We can't all be saved. It's out of the question."

"Hang on, old boy! They will send us help soon," answered Rush in an encouraging tone.

"They can't send help in time to save us. I've a proposition to make."

"What is it?"

"Dominick and I must let go, that's all."

"You will do nothing of the sort!"

"We must. It is the only way to save you. If we don't, the three of us are lost. You can't hold both of us."

Steve laughed harshly.

"I think you will have difficulty in convincing Dominick that he must let go. He'll never let go as long as he has my feet to hang to."

"I'll show you whether he will or not. I'll——"

"Bob!"

Steve's tone was sharp and commanding.

"Hang on, both of you! I, too, have a plan to suggest. I don't know whether we can get away with it or not, but we will try. You must move very carefully, for I am getting tired."

"What's your plan?"

"One of you climb up my body. I can't help you. You will have to accomplish it the best way you can. If you can get up beside me on the bar here, you ought to be able to hold on. It is our only hope. Otherwise we shall be dashed to death at the bottom of the shaft."

"I'll try it. Dominick, do you understand?"

"Me understand."

"Then see that you do as you are told. You go first. Tell him what to do, Steve."

"Climb very carefully. Don't hurry or make any sudden moves. If you do, you will jerk me loose from the bar here. Be as quick as you can without fumbling. Dominick, you swing to my left leg, Bob holding to the other. Be careful that you don't drop off when you make the change. There, that's a relief," added Steve when they had made the change as directed.

"We are ready," announced Bob.

"Come along, Dominick. That's right; you are doing well. When you get up a little further hook one hand into my belt and rest a minute. You will be all right in a few minutes. Gracious, my arms are getting tired!"

The Italian had begun to climb up the Iron Boy's leg, creeping inch by inch, breathing hard, the man's eyes fairly starting from his head in his terrible fear of the death that he knew

awaited him a thousand feet below. All the time Steve's calm, steady voice was encouraging the man, directing him and urging him on to renewed efforts.

"Hurry up," called Jarvis. "I'll be letting go myself, first thing you fellows know."

"There you are. Grab the bar," commanded Steve sharply.

With an exclamation that was almost a shout of joy, the Italian fastened both hands over the iron bar.

"Can you hang on there for a few minutes?" questioned Steve.

"Me hang—me hold fast."

"That's right. I will relieve you in a minute. Now, Bob, it is your turn. Can you climb up here?"

"Watch me. Can you hold on, Steve?"

"All the rest of the day. You are a featherweight compared with the weight I have been holding up. But hurry."

Jarvis began to climb, moving cautiously, throwing as little strain on the arms of Steve Rush as was possible under the circumstances.

"You're doing well. Come along," urged Steve. "This is like building a human pyramid the way we used to do it at high school. Have you got the bar?"

"Right you are. Hooray!"

Steve Rush breathed a deep sigh of relief. He knew that he could have held on but a few minutes longer. His arms were at the point of giving out when the Italian had begun to climb. But now he felt that they were all safe for the moment, though there was only a slender iron bar between them and destruction at the bottom of the shaft.

"Now, what are we going to do—hang here all the rest of the day?" demanded Bob Jarvis.

"No; we shall not be able to do that. I'm going to save Dominick if you will help me. Both of you move over as close to the ends of the bar as possible; then I will tell you what I want to do."

Dominick and Bob did as directed, edging along the iron bar inch by inch. Steve's candle was burning dimly, the others having gone out; but the single candle lighted up the scene so that they could see what they were about.

"Now listen to what I have to say," directed Rush with as much calmness as if he were managing a piece of work above ground.

In Steve Rush and Bob Jarvis the reader has no doubt ere this recognized the Iron Boys, the lads who, as told in "The Iron Boys in the Mines," began their career in the industrial world by joining the army of workers underground, deep down in the Cousin Jack Iron

Mine. It will be recalled how the friendship of the two sturdy boys began with their battle in the lonely drift, where Steve, though of somewhat slighter build than the other, not only held his own, but gave Bob Jarvis the roughest handling he had ever received. Almost from the beginning the lads had attracted the attention of their superiors by their attention to duty, their intelligent work and their honesty. It will be remembered how Steve and Bob invented a new gravity system for the mine, by which many thousands of dollars were saved for the mining company; how the lads saved the officials of the company from being blown up by dynamite and how in the end they were rewarded by the officers for their bravery.

Rush and Jarvis were still inspectors of the trackage in the mine. The second mine of the group had been added, so that now they were in charge of the tracks in both the Cousin Jack and the Red Rock Mines. Beyond this there had been a rumor that the Iron Boys were to receive further promotions. A clerk in the office had whispered this to the boarding-house boss where the boys lived. As yet the boys knew nothing of the proposed promotion, and they never would know unless they were quickly rescued from the desperate situation into which they had been so suddenly plunged.

"What is your plan now?" questioned Jarvis. "I am listening."

"I want you to stay where you are, both of you, for I shall shake the cage up a bit."

Steve began swaying his body back and forth as if he were in reality about to essay the giant swing. All at once he curled his legs up and over the bar. There he hung for a moment, then by sheer strength swung himself up astride the bar.

"Well, that's a stunt for certain," cried Bob, for the moment lost in admiration of the feat he had just witnessed. "I'd like to see a circus performer beat that, especially if he were hanging over a thousand feet of nothingness, with a couple of clumsy louts trying to pull him down."

"This is better," announced Rush, with a mirthless grin.

"Yes, it must be fine, but what now? My arms will be giving out pretty soon, and I shouldn't be surprised if Dominick were getting uneasy. How about it, Dominick?"

"Me all right," answered the Italian stolidly.

"Move over here, Bob. Dominick, you stay where you are. I will take care of you in a moment. Now curl up your feet as you saw me do, Bob."

"Why, I couldn't do that to save my life."

"You will have to, if you expect to save it. I know of no other way. Wait, I'll help you."

Steve leaned over, and, holding to the bar with one hand, reached down, grabbing Bob under one knee.

"Hold fast! There you come."

Jarvis threw all his strength into the effort, and after some clumsy moves landed unsteadily beside Steve Rush on the iron bar.

"Whew! I'd never have made it if it hadn't been for you."

"Come, Dominick; we will have you up here now," said Rush, with a laugh that was intended to encourage his companions. "This is just exercise. No need to feel disturbed about it in the least. Bob, you grab one leg and I will take hold of the other. We will have him right side up in no time at all."

Dominick let out a yell as he felt himself being torn loose from the bar. The Italian floundered. Bob's grip slipped and Dominick dropped head downward.

"He's gone! Oh, what a fool I am!" groaned Jarvis.

But the Italian had not gone. Steve Rush had twisted his own legs about the bar, allowing himself to turn over until he was hanging head downward, both hands gripping one foot of the man Dominick. The latter was howling lustily.

"Get hold of us, Bob," cried Steve.

Jarvis, suddenly recalled to his duty, began edging along the rod until he had reached a point where he was able to hold the Italian until Steve righted himself.

It was a hard struggle, but after a few minutes the two boys succeeded in rescuing their companion and placing him beside them on the iron bar. Dominick was trembling from head to foot. He was so unnerved from his narrow escape that for some moments he could not speak.

"Brace up!" commanded Steve, slapping the man sharply on the cheek.

This brought the Italian around almost instantly. He began chattering angrily in his own language, and in his anger at the blow would have struck Steve had he dared to take his hands from the slender support long enough to do so.

Rush laughed at him.

"Don't lose your temper, Dominick. I was only trying to brace you up. You are all right now. Hang on until I get some of these guard bars free. I'll have a support for all of us in a moment. Sit perfectly still or you may jar me off, even though you do not fall off yourself."

For the next few minutes the Iron Boy busied himself wrenching loose the bars that fitted into

the opening of the cage to prevent the passengers from falling out. These he laid across the bottom, securing them to the flanges of the cage. They fitted snugly.

"There," announced Steve, after completing his task. "This will be just as good as a solid floor so long as neither of you moves about too much and displaces them. Get over there, Dominick. Now we are all right! They can haul us up just as soon as they want to. I, for one, shouldn't mind feeling something solid underneath me for a change."

"No such luck!" growled Jarvis.

A slight jolt cut short their talk. The lads listened, but heard nothing.

"Something has gone wrong with the machinery," said Steve in a low tone. "I shouldn't be surprised if we had to stay here for a long time."

"No, the cage is moving!" cried Bob excitedly. "Hooray, we're saved!"

"Not yet," answered Steve, as the cage came to a jarring stop after having moved upward a few inches.

CHAPTER II

AN UNEXPECTED PROMOTION

THE hours dragged wearily along, the cage resting motionless, save for an occasional jolt, in the dark shaft. Long ago Steve Rush's candle had burned out, the hot grease dripping down over his hat brim.

All at once, without the usual jarring warning, the cage began to move slowly upward. Being off the track, it bumped along not unlike a handcar running on the ties of a railroad, banging from side to side of the shaft, threatening every instant to precipitate the three men to the bottom.

"Hang on, fellows!" cried Steve. "Watch out that those guard rails do not jar loose. Keep your hands on the ends, and at the first sign of trouble get over on the iron rod."

The others did as he directed.

"You've got the only real head in the mines," grumbled Jarvis.

Rush did not answer. He was too busy looking out for their safety to indulge in further conversation. It was the longest and roughest ride that any one of those three men ever had experienced, and the way up through the shaft

seemed many miles. At last a faint light filtered down about the cage.

"We are getting near the top," announced Bob.

Steve nodded, but did not reply. The light grew stronger.

"Sit steady," warned Rush. "Do not attempt to leave the cage until I tell you, unless you want to get a dandy tumble."

Just then the cage was drawn out into the full daylight, where it stopped. They heard excited voices about them, then a face peered up under the edge of the cage.

"Hello, out there!" called Steve.

"There are men in the cage. They're alive!" cried a voice.

"Yes; help us out," ordered Rush in a matter-of-fact tone. "Our quarters are somewhat cramped."

"Shove some planking over the shaft," commanded a voice that the boys recognized as belonging to Superintendent Penton. "Be quick about it. Hello, in there!"

"Hello, sir," replied Steve.

"Who are you?"

"I am Steve Rush."

"Are you alone?"

"No; Bob Jarvis and Dominick are with me."

"I might have known it. Heaven be praised

that you are safe. How many men were on the car?"

"Four besides ourselves."

"Did they fall?"

"Yes; you will find them at the bottom of the shaft," answered the boy sadly.

The shouting without quickly died away. Planks were cast over the shaft opening, forming a platform on which the men might drop.

"Lower the cage a little," ordered the superintendent.

This was done. Steve was the first to leap down to the platform, followed quickly by Bob Jarvis, then by the Italian. The moment Dominick felt the solid planking underneath his feet, he uttered a yell and started on a run for home. Mr. Penton shouted to him to halt, but Dominick seemed deaf to all outward sounds. He was hurrying home to tell his wife of his hairbreadth escape from death.

In the meantime Mr. Penton had sprung forward, grasping the hands of the Iron Boys, which he wrung heartily, the tears almost blinding his sight, for he had grown to be very fond of these two manly young fellows.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said Steve, "but have you had those poor fellows who fell in looked up?"

"I have just sent a rescue party to the lower

level to look for them. I had not been here ten minutes when you came up. Nothing was being done. Everyone seemed to have lost his head——"

"One man didn't," interrupted Bob Jarvis grimly. "Steve Rush didn't, or three of us would have been down there now, smashed flat."

Mr. Penton nodded.

"You two may go home, if you wish."

"For what, sir?" asked Rush.

"Your nerves no doubt are a little shaken, and——"

"Our nerves are all right, sir. Besides, we may be needed here. I think we had better go down on one of the skips and see if we can be of any service to the men who fell——"

Just then the superintendent was called to the telephone by the side of the shaft. He returned after giving some brief directions.

"It's all over, boys," he said.

"Have they found them?"

"Yes. The men are dead. It could not have been otherwise after that terrible fall. They are sending the bodies up on a skip. I shall be busy here for the next hour. If you will meet me at my office, at the end of the hour, I shall be there. I want to say something to you both. I had intended seeing you some time to-day."

"Very well, sir," replied Steve. "I don't know that I want to stay here, unless there is something that I can do to help you."

"There is nothing," replied Mr. Penton.

The boys walked away, thoughtful and silent. They had taken part in a grim tragedy, such as was likely to happen at any time in the busy mines. To-morrow it would be forgotten and the work of burrowing under the earth would go on just as though nothing out of the ordinary had occurred.

"It was a close call," said Bob, glancing into the thoughtful face of his companion.

Steve nodded.

"Poor fellows," he murmured. "Did they leave families?"

"I don't know."

"We will find out. Perhaps we may be able to do something for them."

Not long after the youths had reached the office of the superintendent, Mr. Penton came in. He shook hands with the boys again, after which he called in the claim adjuster.

"This affair will cost us something in damages," Mr. Penton said. "But the company will pay willingly. Will you two boys make a statement, giving the adjuster all the facts?"

"Certainly, sir," answered Steve.

"Dominick will not get over his fright be-

fore to-morrow, and even at that, his testimony would not be of much value to us."

After a stenographer had been summoned, Steve related in a concise manner the story of the accident to the cage, not neglecting to mention the speed at which the car was traveling when the cage turned turtle.

"Have you anything to add to that, Jarvis?" asked Mr. Penton after Steve had concluded.

"Not a word. I couldn't have told it better."

Mr. Penton did not smile. He regarded Rush thoughtfully.

"That is the clearest and most comprehensive statement of an accident that I have ever listened to, Steve. After it has been transcribed I shall ask both of you to sign it."

This the boys did, swearing to the truth of the statement they had made. The claim adjuster then thanked them and left the room. It was a clear case against the company, for there had been neglect on the part of some employé. The accident would cost the company thousands of dollars, but to the credit of the company there was to be no effort to evade responsibility.

The Iron Boys rose to leave.

"Sit down," said Mr. Penton, motioning them back to their chairs. "As I told you over at the shaft, I desire to talk with you. How long have you been in the mines?"

"I have been here a year. Jarvis has been here a little longer than that," answered Steve.

"Just so. In that time you two have proved yourselves out. You have done well all that has been given to you to do, and you have gone somewhat beyond that, I may add," said Mr. Penton, with a smile. "I want to ask you a personal question."

"Yes, sir."

"Is it your intention to remain in the mines permanently?"

Steve thought a moment before replying.

"I have thought that I should like to familiarize myself with the entire iron and steel business. After I have learned all I can in the mines, I think I should like to go on—to go further——"

"The mills, for instance——"

"Yes, sir."

Bob Jarvis nodded his approval of what Steve had said.

"I rather thought so. While I shall not want to lose you, you may rest assured that I shall leave nothing undone to push you along. You have a career before you, each of you. The keynote of success in the industrial world is patriotism. There is patriotism for flag and country and there is another kind as well—patriotism of achievement. It is this patriotism which ac-

complishes great works in the industrial world. Without it our great industries could not exist."

"Yes, sir; I feel it, sir," said Steve brightly.

"I know that. I have known it for a long time. It is such patriotism as yours that accomplishes results in the world. The president of the company is aware that you possess it. I had a letter from him yesterday regarding you boys."

Mr. Penton turned over the papers on his desk. Selecting the letter he was in search of, he read it, then laid the paper back on his desk.

"Mr. Carrhart, the president, is deeply interested in you. This letter is in reference to you, making certain suggestions. Have you any idea what they are?" laughed the superintendent.

"No, sir."

"I hope he isn't going to discharge us," interjected Bob Jarvis whimsically.

"Not quite so bad as that," answered Mr. Penton, laughing softly. "He does, however, request me to relieve you of your present duties."

Bob's face fell.

"But this is in order to give you something better. I am ordered to promote you to the grade of foremen. How does that strike you?"

"Knocks me clear over," answered Jarvis promptly.

"Promoted to the grade of foremen?" re-

peated Steve, scarcely able to believe that what he had heard was not a mistake.

"Yes. Something more than that. You are to be general foremen—shift bosses. The ordinary foreman, as you know, has charge of the shift in one drift only. You boys will have several drifts under your charge. You have had sufficient experience so that I think you will have no difficulty in handling the work. The more ore you get out the better the company will be satisfied. What the company wants is results. The man who can give them results is the man that the company wants to promote to higher positions. You have done well in this direction already. I shall expect you to continue to advance."

"You are very kind. We shall do the best we can, but it is a responsible position for a boy," replied Steve thoughtfully.

"For a mere boy, yes. I look upon you two lads as men. You have proved up to the mark, and you have done the work, assuming the responsibilities of full-grown men."

"What pay do we get?" questioned Bob Jarvis, with an eye to business.

Mr. Penton laughed.

"That is a business-like question. I was wondering if you were going to ask that."

"Of course I am, sir. I wish to know."

"I will tell you. You will receive, beginning with the first of the coming week, one hundred and twenty-five dollars each per month. You should be able to lay up some money out of that."

"Indeed we shall," answered Steve. "It is a fine salary, but I shall do my best to earn it, as I know Bob will."

Jarvis nodded more emphatically than ever.

CHAPTER III

STEVE SHOWS THE IRON HAND

"TELL the mine captain that I wish to see him," said Steve Rush to one of the men working in his shift.

"Where is he?"

"That is what I am sending you to find out," answered the young foreman, somewhat sharply.

The messenger hurried away, grumbling to himself. While the Iron Boys were popular in the mines, there had been no little grumbling when it was learned that they had been promoted over men who had spent many years in the mines. Steve knew and understood this, but he knew that he had done no one an injustice. He had worked hard, and if his employers considered that he was entitled to promotion that was his own good fortune.

"One seldom gets anything in this world unless he works for it and earns it," was the lad's wise conclusion on this particular morning, as his keen eyes caught a disgruntled look on the face of more than one man working under him.

Steve, true to his name, was pushing the work of his employers with his characteristic rushing tactics. Upon taking up the new work he had

made a brief speech to each shift in his department.

"Men," he said, "I am younger than most of you, but you may depend upon one thing. I shall always treat you with absolute fairness and do you justice. If at any time you think such is not the case, tell me so, or go to the superintendent. If I fail in my duty toward you, at any time, it will be because I do not know better, and under such circumstances I shall be glad to be enlightened. However, the business of the mining company comes first. Everything must give way before that. Our sole business in life, down here, is to get out iron ore. I am satisfied that this drift has not been getting out nearly as much as it should. I shall hereafter expect at least two more tons a day than you have been mining. If you find that you cannot do it, you will have to give me a good excuse. The ore is running soft. You'll never have easier work than what is before you now. Take some pride in your work. See if you can't beat them all. If you break records I shall see to it that those higher up are informed of it. That is all I have to say."

A similar speech was made by Rush to each of the dozen drift crews under his command. Either his words, or the manner in which he spoke them took hold of the men, for the output

of the twelve drifts was increased by twelve tons the first day.

Superintendent Penton rubbed his eyes when the report came in to him that night. He wondered if a mistake had not been made. On the report of the ore mined in Bob Jarvis' department he found a substantial increase also, though not within half a dozen tons of that shown by Steve Rush.

Mr. Penton said nothing, but decided to wait until the week was over, when, if the increase held up to the mark set, he would call the attention of the Duluth officials to the gain. He knew this would please Mr. Carrhart, for the president had great confidence in Rush, and in his rough and ready companion, Jarvis.

Both boys were stationed on the twentieth level, far down in the earth in the Red Rock Mine, to which they had been transferred with their promotion. That morning Steve had been making an inspection of the various drifts. It was the first opportunity he had had to make a thorough examination of them. In section twenty-four L he had made a discovery that led him to send for the mine captain at once.

"Anything gone wrong?" demanded the mine captain, strolling in half an hour later.

"No, but there is likely to be. Come in here. I want to show you something."

Steve led the way into the drift, where the diamond drills were banging away in a deafening chorus. He motioned for the men to shut off the drills; then, climbing up on the crumbling ore that was being shoveled into the tram cars, he held his candle up to the peak of the dome-like drift.

"Do you see that?" demanded Steve.

"I don't see anything very alarming."

"You don't?"

"I do not."

Rush pointed to a seam in the rocks overhead. The seam extended along through some three feet of rock and ore. There was a narrow opening or crack there into which the lad jabbed his sharp-pointed candlestick.

"Now do you see what I am trying to show you?"

"Pshaw! That's nothing. We always get those cracks in back-stoping."

"We are not back-stoping now; we're drifting," protested Steve. "That drift is dangerous."

"No more so than any of them. This isn't a kid's job; it's a man's job down in these mines."

"I am simply pointing it out to you, sir. At the same time I want to ask your permission either to abandon the drift until it can be shored

up, or to back-stope until we can get through to solid rock."

"Go on with your drifting. We can't stop for a little thing like that, I tell you," answered the mine captain, turning and starting away.

"Pull out your drills," commanded Rush.

The drill-men began to obey his command.

"Shovelers and trammers knock off. Hand in your time until I can see the superintendent and get you in a new place."

The mine captain came striding back. He had overheard the orders of the young foreman, and the captain's face reflected his anger.

"See here, what are you doing?" he demanded sternly.

"I am closing this drift for the present."

"I order your men back to work. What do you mean by interfering with the work of this shift?"

"I already have told you what I mean, sir. I decline to risk the lives of the men in section twenty-four L until it has been made safe."

"Get back to work, every man of you, unless you want to be fired out of this mine!" commanded the captain.

Steve raised a warning hand.

"Men, I am your foreman. You will obey me. Mr. Mine Captain, you have no right to give these men orders over my head. I have asked

you for protection for them. You refuse to give it. I am responsible for their safety, so all work will stop in this drift, so far as I am concerned, until you have made the drift safe."

"I'll report you; I'll put another crew to work. I'll——"

"And I'll report you if you do. I have no intention of being disrespectful, and I am willing to take the responsibility for my act."

With this Steve urged his men out of the drift. The captain fumed, but he knew full well that Steve was right in saying that he had no right to order the men back to work.

No sooner had the men of the regular shift withdrawn and gone up to the surface, than the mine captain gathered another crew and set them to work in section twenty-four L, Steve in the meantime having gone to another part of the works. The captain did not want the daily output to fall behind, for that would reflect on him. The captain set the new shift at work, then went away about his business, muttering his threats against the young foreman.

When Steve passed that way again his attention was attracted by a light in the drift. Somewhat surprised, he turned into section twenty-four L to learn what was going on in there. He found a new crew at work.

"Who sent you in here?" he demanded.

"The captain did," was the answer.

"Very well; so long as he has done so it is not for me to order you out. You do not belong to my crew. But let me warn you, men. This drift is not safe. Some or all of you are likely to get hurt. I should advise against your working here. I have sent my crew away and they will not come into the drift until something has been done to make it safe."

The miners laughed and went on with their work. The drill-men were boring in, making openings for the dynamite sticks, while the trammers were loading, taking their time at the work.

Steve turned away when he saw that the men did not take his warning seriously. He made his way to the telephone, where he called up Superintendent Penton, acquainting him with conditions in section twenty-four L.

The superintendent said he would be down as soon as he could get into his mine clothes. He directed Steve to leave matters as they were until he could look into the affair. At the same time Mr. Penton warned Steve that these disagreements between mine captain and foremen were very bad for the discipline of the mine.

"I am willing to assume the full responsibility for my act, sir," was the answer of the young foreman, as he hung up the receiver and started away, his lips shut tightly together, a look of

stubborn determination on his face. Steve was ready to give or take.

Shortly after that Mr. Penton arrived. He looked up the mine captain first, and heard what the latter had to say. Then the two men sought out Steve Rush, whom they found directing the work of one of his crews.

"Rush, this is a bad piece of business. What have you to say for yourself?"

"There is nothing more to say, sir, so far as I am concerned. It is for you to decide whether I am in the right or the wrong."

"You say the drift is not safe for the men to work in?"

"I do."

"The mine captain disagrees with you, and you have had an argument with him before the men. Rush, I am surprised at you."

Steve's face flushed a dull red, but he held his head erect, looking the superintendent squarely in the eyes.

"I am willing to assume all the responsibility for my act. One of the first lessons I learned from you, sir, was to guard the lives of the men as I would my own. I do not think there was need for me to learn the lesson. I should have done it anyway. The drift is in a dangerous condition. No men under my charge shall work there in its present condition. If you say they

are to do so I shall step down and out. I do not want to feel, after an accident has occurred, that I am responsible for the maiming of a lot of men, not to mention the possible loss of life."

"That's what comes from giving a kid authority," nodded the mine captain.

The superintendent raised a restraining hand.

"I will have a look at the drift. You may come with us, Rush."

The three started away, Steve walking on ahead, the superintendent and mine captain bringing up the rear. They had gone something more than half way through the cross-cut when they saw a miner approaching them on the run. Steve saw at once that something had gone wrong.

"What's the matter?" he cried before the man got up to him.

"Twenty-four L has caved in, burying the whole crew!" panted the messenger. "There's tons of red ore and rock on them. They're wiped clean off the slate!"

CHAPTER IV

MYSTERY IN THE AIR

"RUSH, I owe you an apology. Had we listened to you, the company would have saved several thousands of dollars in damages that they will now have to pay," said the superintendent.

This conversation took place on the day following the accident in section twenty-four L. It had been a serious affair. The entire dome of the drift had caved in, starting from a crack in the rocks which the Iron Boy had pronounced dangerous. At the time of the cave-in, the drill-man had been operating the diamond drill. The vibration had loosened the rocks and the whole roof had collapsed. The drill-man and his assistant had been killed, and nearly every other man in the drift at the time had been injured.

The unfortunate miners were quickly dug out, Steve Rush working in the dangerous drift at the imminent risk of losing his own life, with rock and ore showering about him almost every second of the time. For a time it was feared that the whole length of the tunnel would cave in, but under the direction of the superintendent fresh pillars and lagging were quickly set in

place, saving the mine from more serious disaster.

"I am afraid," continued Mr. Penton, "that the mine captain in the Red Rock will be reduced to the ranks, or dropped altogether as the result of this. It is a matter that the president will have to decide."

"I am sorry, sir, if I have been the cause of trouble for him."

"Cause? Why, if he had followed your advice the disaster would not have occurred. I have made a report of the entire matter, giving you full credit. I also want to ask if you have inspected the other drifts in your shift."

"Yes, sir."

"Do you consider them safe?"

"Yes, sir. Of course, a crack is likely to develop at any time."

"I know that. But you must keep close watch on them. I have had every foreman make a careful inspection and report on the condition of the various works. Each foreman, hereafter, is to be held personally responsible for the safety of his works, so far as man can guard against accidents."

"I am glad of that, sir."

"At the same time I wish to congratulate you on the increased production of your section. It is an object lesson for the rest of the mine. I

don't imagine the other foremen are pleased with the pace you have set for them."

The end of the noon hour was at hand, so Rush hurried back and descended in the cage to the level where he was to work. Later in the afternoon he and Bob Jarvis met, their sections adjoining, thus enabling them to have frequent conversations during the day.

For a time they discussed the accident of the previous day, Steve giving his companion advice about watching the condition of the drifts.

"This is a dangerous mine at best, and I shouldn't be surprised if we had a really serious accident one of these days," said Steve.

"It strikes me that we have had one already," replied Bob.

"Yes, it was bad enough. I am not an engineer, but I have eyes. In the first place, look at the woodwork down here. Why, it's as dry as powder. It is different from the Cousin Jack Mine, where everything is damp or wet. Just look at these piles of chips and shavings. I am surprised that the officers of the company will stand for such a condition of affairs."

"It's an old mine," suggested Bob.

"Yes, that is it. The mine has been worked for twenty years and it will soon be abandoned. I presume for that reason they do not wish to spend any more money on it than is actually

necessary. The roofs of the levels are pretty well shored up, but they are all settling. You can see that without half looking."

"I hope we won't have any trouble while we are working here," said Bob thoughtfully.

"So do I. It is a hazardous calling that you and I have chosen, old man. Between cave-ins, dynamite explosions, falling cages and other troubles we shall have to keep our eyes open."

"Yes, and we have got a bad lot of men about us," added Jarvis.

"The foreigners, you mean?"

Bob nodded.

"Yes, they are a choice lot of anarchists," continued Steve. "Many of them have leanings in that direction. Between the Finns, the Huns and the Italians the company has its hands full."

"It is a pity they do not clean out that crowd. These fellows will cause trouble some time."

"That is what I think. And, between you and me, Bob, something is going on in these mines."

"What do you mean?"

"Something is doing——"

"I hadn't noticed it."

"Haven't you seen the men talking in little groups, especially at the noon hour?"

"Yes, I have seen that."

"And have you noticed that, when a white man approaches, they quickly disperse."

"Yes."

"Well, what does that mean?"

"I will confess that I hadn't attached any special significance to it, but, now that you speak of it, it does seem strange."

"That is the way the matter strikes me. It is none of our business, and yet it is. Some of our men are in the scheme, whatever it may be."

"Are you going to tell Mr. Penton?"

"No, not now," replied Rush after brief reflection. "He will tire of our running to him with every little thing. Besides, I give the superintendent credit for at least ordinary shrewdness. He undoubtedly knows what is going on just as well as we do, and perhaps a great deal better."

"What do you think they are planning, if anything?"

"It is a mystery to me, Bob, but I am going to find out. I have a right to do that so far as my own men are concerned, and so have you. It is our duty to know what is going on in our own sections."

"Then why don't you ask the men outright?" demanded Jarvis.

"That would be a foolish thing to do. By letting them think we have no suspicions we shall learn what they are planning sooner or

later. You don't suppose they would tell me if I were to ask them, do you?"

"No, I guess that's so."

"Then keep your eyes open and I will do the same. When we get anything definite, perhaps we will go to Mr. Penton with it."

"Is the plotting, or whatever it is, going on over in the Cousin Jack, too?"

"I think so. I noticed it when I was over there two days ago. It is curious to me that the mining captains are not wise by this time."

"This one never would discover anything. Are they going to keep him?"

"I do not know," answered Steve. "Naturally I have not asked. I am in rather a delicate position, in view of the fact that I got the captain into this difficulty."

Bob nodded thoughtfully.

"Well, I must get back to my work. I think it is safe to say that nothing will occur yet a while, and perhaps not at all. But we shall be on the job when it does, old man."

Waving their hands in parting salute, the young foremen turned and walked away to attend to their duties. But, though they did not apprehend any immediate trouble, they were destined, within the next few days, to meet with the most thrilling experiences of their lives—experiences that they would never forget.

CHAPTER V

"THE MINE IS ON FIRE"

THREE days had passed uneventfully, the Iron Boys having kept up their record for mining more ore than any other section in either of the company's mines. How they succeeded in doing so was a mystery to Mr. Penton, for he failed to discover that the boys were applying any new methods to the operation of their drifts.

At noon on the third day, when most of the miners were eating their dinners in the mines, the foremen and shift bosses having come to the surface, Steve also had come up for the purpose of going to his boarding place to get a pair of boots.

The lad ate a quick dinner at the boarding house, then hurried back toward the shaft. Bob had remained in the mines, and Steve hoped to be down in time to have a chat with his friend before the whistles blew for the resumption of work at a quarter after one o'clock. The Iron Boy was walking rapidly, when all of a sudden just about an eighth of a mile from the Red Rock shaft, he saw a wisp of smoke shoot up from the main shaft.

Steve halted, fixing a keen glance on the dark upper works of the towering shaft trestle.

"That's curious," he muttered. "I am sure I saw smoke there. Perhaps it came from the engine house yonder. But, no; the wind is in the opposite direction."

The lad saw no further signs of smoke, so he started on, half believing that he had been wrong. He had gone but a short distance when he halted suddenly, uttering an exclamation of startled amazement at what he beheld.

A huge column of black smoke burst from the shaft, shooting high in the air. When far above the top of the shaft the column opened up like an umbrella, darkening the landscape, throwing the base of the upper works into deep shadow.

"There's been an explosion!" cried Steve. "They'll all be lost down there!"

The lad sprang forward, running with all speed toward the mouth of the shaft. Ere he had reached it, however, sparks were belching from the mouth of the shaft. The smoke was so dense, however, that the shaft was almost hidden from view.

Men were running toward the scene from all directions, shouting and yelling. Steve was not saying a word. As he ran his mind was actively at work. He understood what was happening underground. He did not know what the cause

had been, though he believed there had been an explosion.

"The mine's on fire! The mine's on fire!" was the cry passed from mouth to mouth. Pandemonium seemed to have broken loose. The cage gong at the shaft entrance could be heard through the heavy smoke, crashing out its plea for help.

The cage-tender was too excited to give the signal any heed. He had run from the mouth of the shaft, half suffocated by the smoke. Steve dashed up to the man, grabbed him by the collar and spun the fellow about.

"Get to work! There are men down in the mine trying to get up. Start the cage!"

"I—I can't. The smoke will strangle me."

"Haul up that cage, you coward!" roared Rush, giving the man a shove that sent him staggering toward the shaft. The fellow was about to turn back when he saw Steve striding quickly after him. Then he dived into the dense smoke, answered the signal and began hauling up the cage. Rush followed him, dipping his own handkerchief into a pail of water as he passed.

"Stuff the handkerchief into your mouth. Get somebody to keep you supplied with wet cloths."

The cage came to a rattling stop and a dozen black-faced miners staggered out into the open.

Steve dragged them out into the fresh air.

"What's happened down there? Tell me quick!" he demanded.

"It's a roaring furnace! The whole mine's afire," gasped the man.

"Are there any alive to come up in the cage?"

"N-n-n-no."

"Send the cage down!" commanded Rush, dashing to the mouth of the shaft. "Watch sharp for signals. Stand by your post unless you want to be thrown in. Be a man! This is no place for cowards. Where's the superintendent?"

"I—I don't know."

Steve dashed out. A new idea had occurred to him. He rubbed the smoke from his smarting eyes as he emerged into the open. The lad was so dizzy on account of the smoke from the burning mine that he could scarcely keep his feet.

As soon as he was able to collect his senses he glanced toward the shaft where the lumber skip went down into the mine to carry the timber for the bull gang, the timber used in shoring up the levels to keep them from caving in.

There was smoke there, too, but Rush noted that it was not nearly so dense as in the main shaft.

"I don't believe there is much fire near that

shaft. I hope the men have been able to get to that part of the mine."

The Iron Boy started on a run for the lumber skip.

"Where's your skip?" he demanded sharply.

"On the first level."

"Jerk it up here! Why aren't you bringing up the men on it?"

"I haven't had any orders to do so."

Rush restrained himself with difficulty. The skip came up with a bound and the lad jumped into it, bracing his feet on the narrow flooring, grasping the shelving steel over his head.

"Drop me to the twentieth. Let her go full speed."

"You'll be killed," warned the skip-tender.

"Do as I tell you, and be quick about it, unless you want to answer to me here and now. I'll——"

Steve's words were cut short. The skip-tender threw his throttle wide open. The skip shot down at a frightful rate of speed. The rapidity of his descent took the boy's breath away. He gasped, opening his mouth wide to fill his lungs with air. But he did not succeed very well. He feared that he would fall from the skip in his dizziness, there being no guards to prevent his doing so. The front of the scoop-shaped skip was not protected in any way, and

the slightest slip would send the solitary passenger to his death.

The skip stopped with a jolt that hurled Steve Rush forward on his face. He thought that was to be the last of him. A moment later, however, the brave lad discovered that the skip had stopped at the twentieth level, and that he had been thrown out into the level itself.

Scrambling to his feet, the lad uttered a shout to attract the attention of anyone who might be near.

There was no reply. Steve nearly strangled from the smoke he had drawn into his lungs. The drift was silent and deserted, the electric lights gleaming dimly in the thick veil of smoke that hung over everything.

"I wonder where they are?" breathed the lad, keeping his lips tightly shut. "They must be trying to work their way up by the ladders."

Running to another part of the level, the Iron Boy sprang up a ladder and once more uttered a long-drawn shout.

"Hello," came the answer. "Where are you?"

"Chute thirty-one."

A man came running through the half darkness. His face was so blackened from smoke that Rush did not recognize him.

"Is that you, Steve?" cried a familiar voice.

"Yes—Bob, is that you?"

"What's left of me."

Steve gave his companion a mighty hug.

"Where are the men? Quick, tell me! We must help them!"

"I've been herding them on the lower level; that is, all of them that I have been able to find, but they are the craziest lot I ever saw. The heathens won't listen to reason."

"How bad is the fire—is the whole mine going?"

"It strikes me that it is pretty well gone already."

"Come on! We've got our work cut out for us," cried Steve, starting along the level at a brisk trot. "You've shown great judgment in getting the men below. Is there much water down there?"

"No, not very much, but enough to keep them from burning to death, I guess."

The chums had gone but a short distance when Rush caught the crackling sound of burning timber. The smoke was becoming suffocating and the boys were obliged to move with more caution.

"We can't get through there, Bob."

"No; this has started since I came through."

"We shall have to go around through the cross-cut. That isn't on fire, is it?"

"I don't know. It was not when I was over there last."

"How many levels are on fire? Do you know?"

"I guess most of them are. You see, the fire works down through the wooden rises, then scattering, sets the woodwork on each level ablaze."

This gave Steve Rush a sudden idea.

"They can't all be going. Get together a lot of the men. We'll station two or three at each rise with pails of water and the gangs ought to be able to head off the fire when it comes through."

"That's a good idea. I'm with you."

The Iron Boys hurried away. They found groups of excited men, so beside themselves with fear that they were powerless to think or to act.

Steve was obliged in some instances to handle the men roughly—men much larger and stronger than himself—in order to shake some courage into their trembling bodies.

Yet he did not blame them so much. It was a scene calculated to shake the nerves of the strongest men. The interior of the mine was a roaring furnace; the flames were crackling with a sinister sound, eating their way through the dry timber. Now and then a dull, heavy reverberation told where a drift or a level had caved in under the weight of the rocks above it.

In the meantime Rush had explained to the men what he wanted done. The mine captain was not in the mine and the men all seemed to have lost their heads completely. After a time, however, Steve succeeded in getting a number of them to the point where he thought they would be able to obey orders.

Rush headed the first shift and led the way to a rise on a level that had not been attacked by the flames. Stationing a squad there, he went on to other levels, and other rises, arranging his forces in the same manner.

While he was doing this, Bob Jarvis was performing a similar service. The boys had no thought, apparently, for their own safety. They were working to save the company's property, and at the same time to make it possible for the men still in the mine to live. By this time the smoke had become so thick in the lumber shaft that it was impossible for anyone either to get up or down. The skips and the cage had stopped running altogether.

One of the foremen in the mines had been stationed at the only telephone that was working, where Steve directed him to keep the superintendent informed of the progress of the fire and of the work that was being done to check it. At the same time the Iron Boy was calmly demanding orders from his superior.

"Tell Rush I have no orders to give. What he cannot think of is beyond me," was the answer sent back to the mine from Mr. Penton.

No one knew how many lives had been lost, though everyone believed that a great disaster had overtaken the miners in the Red Rock Mine. This was true. Many had been cut off by the caving in of the roofs of the levels and drifts, while others, having been overcome by smoke, had fallen unconscious, some never to rise again.

Steve Rush, with his companion and a band of courageous men, was now fighting desperately to confine the fire to the eastern section of the mine, which was nearest to the shafts.

Both boys had thrown off their coats, they had lost their hats, their faces were black and almost unrecognizable, and the hair of each was badly singed.

"The telephone has gone out of business," announced the man whom Steve had assigned to this work.

"Very well; we shall be in the same condition if we do not succeed in stopping the progress of the fire."

Every little while the workers were obliged to flatten themselves upon the ground for a breath of fresher air. Now and then one would topple over unconscious, to be dragged out of harm's way by a companion. On all this Steve

kept a watchful eye. Thus far he had not lost a man, thanks to his watchfulness and bravery.

All at once a new idea occurred to Rush that startled him.

"Bob!" he called.

Jarvis was at his side instantly.

"What about the powder room?"

"The—the—the pow——" stammered Jarvis.

"Yes; what about it?"

"Why—why, the fire must be right on it at this very minute. I—I never thought of it before. I——"

"Then the whole mine will be blown up!" cried Steve. "*There are more than five tons of dynamite in that room!*"

CHAPTER VI

THROUGH TUNNELS OF FLAME

STEVE waited not a moment.

"Keep working, men!" he shouted, starting away at top speed.

"Come back!" yelled Jarvis. "You'll be blown to death."

"We'll all be blown to death if someone doesn't stop the fire before it gets to the powder room."

"Then I'm going with you," answered Bob Jarvis, following after his companion at top speed. "It isn't any worse for me than it is for you."

"Stay back there and handle the men!" flung back Steve over his shoulder.

Bob paid no attention to the command. He was running at full speed in order to keep up with his companion, for Steve, with a handkerchief stuffed in his mouth, was running on the toes of his heavy shoes, darting in and out of drifts, making sharp detours to get around a burning spot that was too hot to be passed with safety.

"Keep shouting, or I'll lose you," cried Bob.

"I can't! I'll choke!" was the faint answer.

On raced the two boys, Bob gaining on Steve very slowly, struggle as he might to decrease the other's lead.

"We're too late!" groaned Jarvis, as the lads came to a sudden halt. Before them the flames were crackling viciously in the dry woodwork of the drift leading into the earth for some sixty yards, where the powder room was located. "Get out of here, or we'll be blown to smithereens!"

"Bob, we've *got to* find some way to save the magazine. Think what it will mean if we do not! Why, it will wreck the whole mine and the chances are that not a man of all the crew will get out alive."

"Yes, but how are we going to do it?"

Steve stood thoughtful for a moment, while second by second the flames were eating farther and farther into the drift, drawing nearer and nearer to the deadly stuff that was piled in cases behind the wooden partition that stood in the drift beyond the flames just around the bend.

"I'm going through," announced Steve firmly.

"You are not going to try to get through that burning drift, are you?"

"That's exactly what I am going to do. It's our only hope, old man. We're surely doomed if I don't. If I fail then I shall have done my best. Take off your shirt."

"What for?"

"Because I want to use it."

"Why don't you take off your own?"

"That is exactly what I am going to do," answered the lad, proceeding to strip off the garment. "Be quick! We've no time to lose."

Bob began reluctantly to remove his own shirt, which he tossed to Steve.

"Now, what are you going to do?"

Rush did not answer. He began wrapping the two shirts about his head, having first made slits in one of them through which he could see. Both garments were finally twisted about his head until the latter looked several times its natural size.

"Now I want you to stick right here. If I am overcome you'll have to try your best to get me out."

"Yes; I'll be in nice shape to go after you. I'll singe the skin all off my body if I try it. You get out the best way you can, but, mind you, if that fire creeps much closer to the magazine you'll see me making a lively sprint for a safe place."

"There will be no safe place in the mine if that happens, Bob. I guess you won't run."

"No, I guess I won't, at that," admitted the lad. "What are you going to do when you get in there?"

"I am going to try to block the passage so the fire can't get to the magazine. I can't do any less than fail. I will shout if I get safely through the fire; then you will know that I am all right. Good-bye, Bob, if I do not see you again. In case anything happens to me, try to get the men as far away as possible before the blow-up occurs."

Steve Rush bravely bolted into the tunnel of fire. There was fire above his head, sparks falling in a perfect cataract about him, while the drift was full of suffocating smoke.

Bob stood with head bent forward in a listening attitude, apparently unmindful of the shower of burning cinders that fell over him. His whole attention was centred on listening for the call that would signal Steve Rush's safe arrival on the other side of the fire.

It came at last.

"Who-o-o-o-o-p!"

"He's made it!" breathed Bob, with a deep sigh of relief. "I wonder what he is going to try to do? I ought to be in there with him, instead of standing out here doing nothing."

In the meantime Steve, having penetrated beyond the fire zone, made his way quickly to the wooden partition behind which lay the boxes of high explosives. He gave the door a sharp push, but it did not yield.

"It is locked!" groaned the boy. "I've got to get in there, I've got to do it or we are all lost!"

The fire was by this time less than fifty feet behind him, creeping along toward the powder room at a rapid rate.

Steve backed off and threw himself against the door with all his strength. But the door did not move.

Once more did the lad try to break the door in, the rough wood tearing the skin from his shoulders, sending the blood trickling down his sides in tiny rivulets.

Bang!

He hurled himself against the door for the sixth time. The door gave way with surprising suddenness. Steve Rush plunged headlong into the magazine and went down, entangled in the wreck of the splintered door.

Following his sudden entry into the powder room there came a succession of crashes. At first he thought the dynamite was exploding and the boy clenched his hands to meet the great shock that he felt sure would come shortly.

It did not come. Steve suddenly realized that the dynamite was not going to explode just yet; what he had heard was the falling of some of the dynamite cases to the floor, following the shock of the bursting in of the door.

"What a fool I am," cried the lad, starting to get to his feet.

It was then that he made the discovery that he had taken part of the partition down with him and that he was so entangled in the wreck that he would have difficulty in extricating himself. Every second the fire was drawing nearer the magazine. Steve fought as he never had fought before. Seconds seemed hours to him, and the crackling of the flames seemed to be about his very ears. The more he struggled the tighter he seemed to be wedging himself under the timbers and planking that he had carried down with him.

With a mighty effort and in sheer desperation the lad lifted the weight with his body. Then by a quick wriggle he managed to squirm from beneath the planking, clearing all but his feet. These were again caught. They would surely have been crushed had it not been for his heavy shoes.

But now the boy's hands were free, thus enabling him to use them in liberating himself. After a struggle of a few moments he succeeded in getting from under the partition and sprang to his feet.

The electric lights were glowing in the magazine, the circuit not yet having been broken.

At a bound the Iron Boy leaped to the far

side of the magazine. From a box on a shelf he selected half a dozen white, paper-covered objects, somewhat resembling wrapped candles, except that they were larger.

This done, Steve whipped out his knife and cut the electric feed wire that led into the magazine. In doing so he got a shock that nearly knocked him down.

"Gracious, but that wire is hot!" he exclaimed, shaking his hand to restore the circulation. "It never seemed so hot as that before. Everything is hot down here to-day, and I shall be in the same condition if I do not make lively tracks out of here."

Running from the wrecked powder room, the lad sprang down the drift, running straight toward the fire again. As yet he had not replaced the shirts about his head, for he was not yet ready to plunge into the fiery tunnel. The main purpose of his going to the powder room had not yet been carried out.

Reaching a point some twenty feet from the edge of the fire, the lad thrust one of the sticks into a crevice in the rocks. One after another he distributed the sticks in various places, some of them being wedged behind the lagging that supported the drift.

After a few seconds he had distributed them all, forming a line that the fire would be sure

to touch before it could get by to reach the magazine.

Steve could hear Jarvis calling to him now. Perhaps Bob had been doing so right along, but if so, Rush had been so occupied with his task that he had not heard.

"Wh-o-o-p-e-e!" answered the plucky lad. "I'm coming. Look out for me."

Taking a final survey of his work, Steve turned toward the fire again.

"Getting out of here is going to be more difficult than getting in," he decided. "I shall be well singed by the time I get through that wall of fire."

Wrapping the shirts about his head, Steve dived into the fiery tunnel, holding his breath as he ran.

The heat was terrific. He could feel it burning through his trousers, and he could smell the burning cloth about his head. He had thrust his hands into his trousers' pockets, which afforded some protection.

Suddenly he stumbled over a timber that had fallen from its supports and measured his length on the ground. As he fell he uttered a shout.

The fall stunned him, for the boy struck on his head. Bob, however, had heard the cry. Regardless of the fact that neither his head nor

his body was protected, Jarvis dashed boldly into the burning drift. He knew the skin was peeling from his arms, but he did not experience any sensation of pain.

All at once he, too, stumbled and fell in a heap with a deluge of burning embers and live sparks showering about him. But Bob was not stunned. He was very much alive at this particular moment, for he realized for the first time that unless he moved rapidly he would be burned alive.

Just then he felt the object over which he had fallen move.

"Steve! Steve! Is that you?" cried Jarvis.

"Ye—yes."

Bob fastened on him with a powerful grip, and began dragging Rush from the fire, first having stripped off one of the burning shirts.

Steve regained control of himself almost instantly.

"Let go! Run for it! Something is going to happen!" he shouted.

But Jarvis did not let go. He ran faster than ever, holding firmly to his companion. Perhaps he was beginning to understand what Steve expected to happen. At least he was making all the speed possible under the circumstances.

Both boys drew in a long breath as they flattended themselves on the ground, well free of the fire zone.

Steve bounded to his feet.

"Run for your life!" he shouted.

"Is the magazine going up?" cried Bob.

"Something is going up in a minute. It may be the magazine."

This time Rush grabbed Bob, starting on a run with him. Both boys were choking from the smoke they were inhaling.

"You're on fire!" yelled Jarvis. "Stop! I'll put it out."

"No, no, no! Keep going. Don't stop. It won't hurt me to burn a little. I'm already pretty well cooked——"

Boom!

A reverberating report sounded through the level, and the Iron Boys were hurled violently to the ground.

CHAPTER VII

THE IRON BOYS WIN

"NOW we will put out the fire," announced Steve Rush calmly, as he got to his feet and began whipping out the smouldering sparks on the scant covering that he had left on his body.

"The powder house has blown up and the mine is caving in!" cried a miner, dashing in front of them through a cross-cut. A dozen others were following him, yelling wildly.

"There go my firemen. Stop them, Bob!"

Rush sprang out into the cross-cut waving his arms.

"Stop! You are all right if you will keep your heads."

"The magazine's gone up!"

"The magazine has not gone up. Get back to your stations. How is the fire?"

"We were getting the best of it on our level when the powder house went——"

"Nonsense! I tell you it's all right, but unless you do keep the fire from spreading into the other side of the mine you'll go up in smoke, the whole crowd of you. Now get back to work."

Some of the men turned to retrace their steps.

"He's lying to you," shouted one of those who had not turned. "Come with me, and I'll show you the way out. The kid's gone crazy."

"Back, I tell you! Every man of you!" shouted Steve, placing himself squarely in front of the man who had started to run.

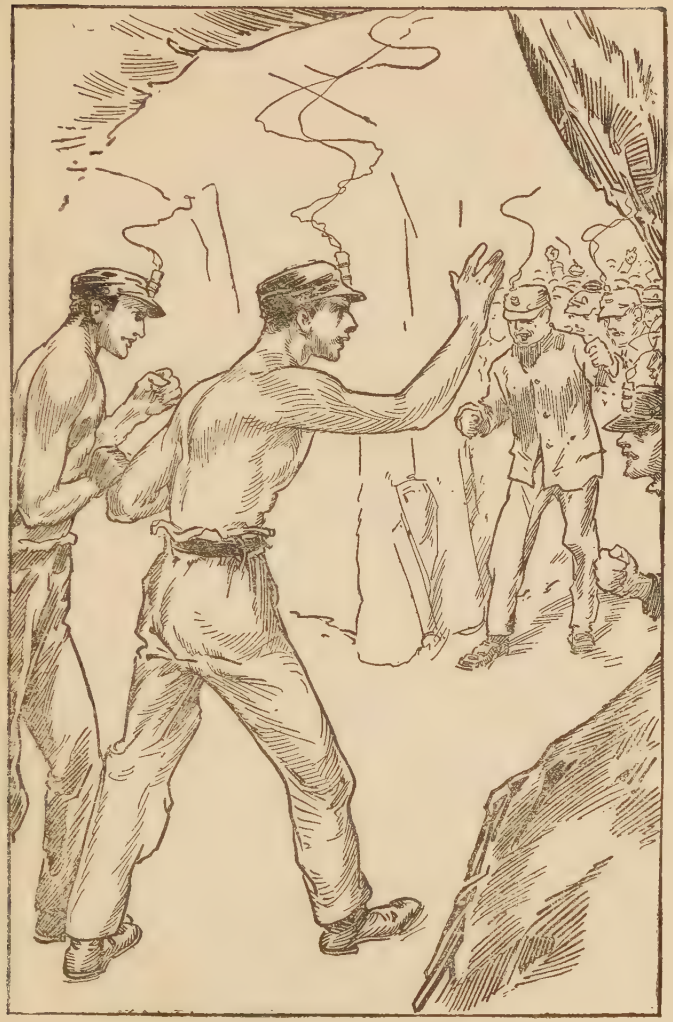
The fellow did not stop. He started to run right over Rush, when, quick as a flash, Steve's clenched fist landed on the miner's jaw, sending the man down in a heap. In the meantime Bob Jarvis, with a howl, had jumped into the fray. He knocked down two men who sought to force their way past him.

"Come on, you cowards! You'll find my fist is harder to get away from than the fire in the lagging. I'll pound every one of you if you don't get back to your stations."

Others had come running along the cross-cut after the explosion, until there were fully thirty men in the party.

Facing them stood the two Iron Boys, naked to the waist, Steve's body streaked with soot and blood. The miners stood hesitating. Somehow the courage of the two lads shamed the men. They wavered between their shame and their fears.

"Go back and do your duty like men," commanded Steve Rush in a firm tone. "Now that you are in condition to listen, I will tell you



"Back, Every Man of You!"

that the powder house has not blown up. There is now little chance that it will."

"But we heard it go up," protested a voice.

"No, you did not. The powder house, in all probability, is buried under tons of rock. I planted the drift with sticks of dynamite. When the fire reached them the explosion of the dynamite caved in the drift, thus shutting off the magazine and burying it. Your danger is from fire alone. Go back to work."

For a moment the rough men gazed at the slender, resolute lad standing before them; then the miners, with one accord, uttered a yell. Before the lads could dodge out of the way the miners had grabbed the Iron Boys, and, uttering choking hurrahs, bore the lads back through the level on a run.

These same men were ready to fight anything now. Their courage had come back to them, increased tenfold. They had realized in a moment what desperate bravery had been Steve's.

From that moment on the men fought desperately against the flames. Little by little, now that systematic efforts were being put forth, the fire died out. The mine was still filled with suffocating smoke, however, and men were being overcome on every hand.

From the surface a band of rescuers had begun to make their way down the ladders into

the mine, headed by the superintendent himself. Each was provided with head-wrappings, damp cloths being placed over mouths and noses.

The instant the rescuers reached the first level. Mr. Penton hurried them off to the west, in order to get them as far away from the magazines as possible. He expected to hear the muffled report of the exploding magazine at any moment, and to feel the ground tremble and settle beneath his feet.

Reaching a point far enough to the west to place them out of immediate danger, should there be an explosion, the party took to the ladders again and began their descent into the heart of the conflagration.

In the meantime Steve Rush had worked out another plan. He had visited the most dangerous places in the mine, learning where the main artery of fire was. This done, the lad sent out men to hunt up sticks of dynamite in some of the working drifts. A few sticks were thus secured. With these Steve blew down the roofs of the levels in several places, thus absolutely checking the fire at these points.

This done, the men had little difficulty in handling the other levels. Mr. Penton, during his slow, dangerous descent, caught the faint boom of the dynamite sticks. He knew that it was not the magazine and concluded that the

distant reports he had heard were caused by the explosion of stray sticks of dynamite that the fire had reached.

At last the party reached the fifteenth level, where the fire-fighting operations were going steadily forward. No one gave the slightest heed to the superintendent and his party. The miners were too busy fighting fire, and they were working with an enthusiasm and force that amazed Mr. Penton.

He hailed a drift foreman.

"Bates, what is the condition down here? I wish to know the details. You can save me time by telling me."

"I think we have the fire under control, sir."

"Is the mine badly damaged?"

"I fear it is."

"How many levels have been burned?"

"There has been fire on all of them below this, and, as you probably know, above here, too. I think Steve Rush and Bob Jarvis can give you more information than can I."

"Where are they?"

"I don't know. They're everywhere at once. I never saw anything like those two young fellows. You can give them the credit for saving your mine."

"But the magazines—is there fire near them?" asked the superintendent hurriedly.

"There was."

"Who put it out?"

"Rush and Jarvis did—that is, they got into the powder house, carried out dynamite and blew up the drift ahead of the fire, so it could not reach the explosives."

The blood rushed to the face of the superintendent in a sudden wave of emotion.

"Have any lives been lost?"

"I fear so. We have been too busy to find out. We knew there was nothing that could be done; in fact, there was no possibility of our getting into the other side of the works. If we could get there the men could get here. I believe, however, that Rush and Jarvis have pulled out twenty or thirty men who had been overcome."

"Wonderful!" breathed Mr. Penton. "Come, men; we must go through the mine and make a quick investigation. Bates, have you stationed men through the various levels to watch?"

"I believe Rush has attended to that. In fact, he did that some time ago. He took matters into his own hands, and we were very willing to have him do so, for the men were crazed with fear."

Just then a man rushed into the level where Mr. Penton and the foreman were standing. This man was bare to the waist, his skin so

blackened with smoke as to render him almost unrecognizable.

"Who is that?" demanded the superintendent sharply.

"That's Rush."

Steve had not observed Mr. Penton.

"I want ten volunteers to go with me to the other side of the mine. It will be hot in there, but we've got to look after the men in that section. Some of them, no doubt, are imprisoned in drifts that have caved in, and——"

"Steve!"

Mr. Penton strode forward with outstretched hand.

"Steve, my boy, come here."

The Iron Boy sprang forward, grasped Mr. Penton's hand, then turned sharply to the men.

"Who will go with me?"

"I will," answered every man in the drift.

"Rush, you have done enough. I will head the rescue party. It is my place to do so," exclaimed the superintendent. "Where is Jarvis?"

"On the level below this. He is beating out the fire on the main and sub-levels. He has done splendid work, Mr. Penton."

"So I understand. Send for him, and both of you make your way to the surface, if you are able to do so."

"No, sir; we shall stay. We are foremen. It is our duty to remain in the mine as long as there is anything to do. Mr. Bates, with the superintendent's permission, will you relieve Mr. Jarvis and take charge of the work here and below as well?"

Mr. Penton nodded his permission.

"Yes," answered Bates.

Half a dozen men were chosen from that shift, Steve deciding to pick up others on the way to the fire-swept part of the mine. Mr. Penton headed the rescue party, which made its way as rapidly as possible to the other side.

It was a sad duty that the men found before them. The total loss was ten men. Fifty men in various parts of the mine had been buried in drifts and it was night before the last of them had been gotten out. While this was being done watchmen patroled the levels, Steve Rush having laid out the plans for this work. Now and then a fresh blaze would spring up here and there, but in each instance there were men on hand to fight it.

As soon as the last blaze had been extinguished the bull gang began rushing timber down into the mine, and the timber-men got to work, shoring up the weakened levels. All night long the work continued. Neither Steve nor Bob Jarvis would leave the mine. The Iron Boys

seemed to be everywhere at once, especially at points where their services were needed. Mr. Penton found himself deferring to the judgment of the brave lads. There was still need for cool heads. He knew full well that he could depend upon the two boys under all conditions.

Morning came, though the lads did not know it until the day shift came down to work. The mine was still smoky, but it had cleared sufficiently to enable the men to work. No ore was to be taken out that day, all hands starting in to clean up the mine. The Iron Boys, after having been on duty for twenty-four hours, made their way to the surface, first having borrowed jackets to cover their backs. They went to their boarding house, and, after a bath, tumbled into bed, remaining there until late in the evening.

CHAPTER VIII

BEGINNING TO UNDERSTAND

MR. CARRHART, the president of the mining company, arrived early on the following morning. He was an experienced engineer, and with a force that is characteristic of successful men in the industrial world, he quickly put the mine in working condition.

In the meantime Mr. Carrhart had listened to the tale of the heroism of the Iron Boys. They had saved the company thousands of dollars by their efforts. On the second day he sent for the two boys and extended to them his hearty congratulations, assuring them at the same time that he would show the appreciation of the company in a more substantial way. He asked Steve if there were anything he could do for him at that moment.

"No, sir; I thank you," was the prompt answer.

Late that afternoon Steve was approached by an inspector in the mines named Cavard, a Russian. His first name, being practically unpronounceable, had remained in disuse so long that nearly every one in the mine had forgotten

it. Cavard was called the Duke for short, because of his dignified carriage and aristocratic airs. He was greatly respected, however, especially by the foreign element in the mine, over whom he exercised considerable influence. It was Cavard to whom they turned to settle their differences; it was Cavard who advised them in their money matters, and it had been rumored that he had profited through this until he had amassed quite a sum of money. However, the man was an experienced miner. He had worked up from grade to grade until he had become an inspector, and though the officials of the company did not like the man personally, they were forced to admit that he was valuable to them.

Steve knew Cavard, though he had never passed five minutes' conversation with him since the lads had been in the employ of the company. Steve did not like the fellow; he had distrusted the Duke from the first. Their dislike for each other appeared to have been mutual, Cavard treating both boys with indifference and scorn.

Rush was, therefore, rather surprised when the Russian approached him with cordial, outstretched hand that afternoon on the level where the lad was attending to his duties.

"I want to congratulate you, Rush," said the inspector.

"What for?" asked Steve rather brusquely.

"For your heroism at the time of the fire. The men are all proud of you."

"Thank you. I simply did my duty. Anyone would have done the same."

"But the fact remains, my boy, that no one did the same. The men were panic-stricken. They were crazed with fear."

"So I observed. But I hear good reports of you also. You did your duty, too. Why aren't they congratulating you?"

"Oh, that was nothing. By the way, Rush, you and I ought to be friends."

"I wasn't aware that we were enemies," replied the boy, with a faint smile.

"I did not mean it that way. I meant that we ought to get together and come to a better understanding."

"Thank you; I am too busy to indulge in friendships. I am much obliged for your kindness, though."

"Pshaw, don't talk that way. I want you to do something for me."

"I shall be glad to do whatever I can for you, sir. What do you want?"

"Come and see me. You and I have much to talk over. We can talk better in my own rooms. It may be to your advantage to talk matters over with me."

"What is it you want to talk with me about?" asked Steve.

Steve's suspicions were aroused, though what lay behind the invitation he did not know.

"Will you come?"

"I'll think about it," answered the lad. "Where do you live?"

"Twenty-three, Iron Street."

"Yes, I know the place."

"You might bring your friend Jarvis with you. He will be interested in what I have to say. You are both boys of influence in the mines, and you are advancing rapidly. We ought to be able to work together to our mutual advantage."

Rush bade the inspector good afternoon and went about his duties. The lad was puzzled. That Cavard was influenced by some ulterior motive he was certain. But, puzzle over the matter as he might, Steve Rush was unable to decide in his own mind what that motive might be. He was at first inclined to accept Cavard's invitation to call on him. Upon reflection, however, he decided that he wanted nothing to do with the man.

That evening he talked the matter over with Bob, and Jarvis was of the opinion that the less they had to do with the Russian the better it would be for both of them. Later on, as the

boys were taking their evening walk, they passed Cavard strolling along the street with a stranger. The latter was tall and well dressed. He was red of face, and when he raised his hat to wipe the perspiration from his forehead the boys saw that his head was crowned with a luxuriant growth of red hair. His small, keen eyes took in every detail of the two boys in one comprehensive glance. They saw him ask a quick question of Cavard. The latter glanced at the boys, nodding smilingly, then answered the red-headed man in a tone too low for them to catch the words.

"Who's the red head?" demanded Bob Jarvis.

"I don't know. I never saw him before," answered Steve, gazing searchingly at the two men. "He is a stranger in this vicinity, that is certain. I wonder what he and Cavard are talking about so confidentially. By the way, Bob, have you kept your eyes open of late?"

"I usually do. What particular thing are you talking about?"

"What I spoke about before. Since the fire in the mine there has been more talk than ever going on among the men."

"Yes; I have observed that."

"I have noticed also that our friend Cavard has had a most important part in these talks. I wish I knew what he had in mind when he

urged me to come and see him. I believe that fellow will bear watching, Bob."

"I agree with you there. We'll keep an eye on him. He has nerve, whatever other failings may be his. He certainly made himself useful at the fire the other day and the men would lay down their lives for him at any moment."

"Provided they didn't get an attack of cold feet," added Jarvis, with a grin.

"You couldn't blame them for that. You must remember that the rank and file of the men in the mines are ignorant and unreasoning. In consequence they become easily panic-stricken in time of danger."

"Yes, that's so. A little knowledge does give a man more or less courage."

"Because it gives him greater reasoning powers. It teaches him to reason things out instead of getting scared and running away. That is why the Duke is so far above the rank and file of the workers in the mines."

"I guess you're right, at that," agreed Bob.

"Of course I am. But I am convinced that we shall hear something from Cavard before a great while that will interest us. He has made the first move in asking us to come and see him. Of course we shall not do so, but if he wants to see us very badly he will look us up, depend upon that. If he approaches you, Bob, let him

take the lead, but see to it that you draw him out if you can without committing yourself."

"I'll do that; don't you worry. I'll show him I can play at a game of wits just as well as he can."

"Don't underrate the fellow. Remember, he is a sharp, shrewd man. He is playing a game unless I am greatly in error, and he is playing it very shrewdly. We know that, because not a breath of what he is up to has gotten to our ears."

"Have you asked anyone about him?"

"Well, I had a talk with the mine captain of the Cousin Jack the other day. Jim thinks him a very capable man. He says that Cavard is one of the best men in the mines, and that the Duke has more influence with the miners than has any other man in the mines."

"That statement doesn't enlighten us as to Cavard's game."

"No, but we will eventually find it out. I shall try to throw myself in Cavard's way without appearing to do so. Then perhaps he will open up and give me a clue to what he is driving at."

"That's a good idea. I'll keep hands off and leave you a clear field to work in."

Their further conversation along this line was interrupted by Mr. Penton, who overtook them at that moment. He greeted the lads warmly

and walked with them until he reached his own home, where he left the Iron Boys. They did not refer to the subject again that night. The following day was Sunday, a day when all work is suspended in the mines, no matter how great the demand for output.

Late in the afternoon Steve saw Cavard and the stranger walking out of town, going in the direction of a little lake that lay a mile beyond the mining town. After a time Rush observed other groups moving in the same direction.

"Now I wonder if the whole town is going fishing," mused Rush. "I've a good notion to follow them out and see what is going on. But I think I had better stay at home and attend to my own business."

He did so, in a short time forgetting entirely what he had observed. The matter was again brought to his attention when the men came back just before the supper hour. Some of the men from his own boarding house had been out to the lake. All of them seemed more or less excited over something. The boys asked a few guarded questions, but gained no information whatever, their questions being parried in every instance.

This made Steve Rush all the more determined to get to the bottom of the mystery.

"I'd give a day's wages to know what that

fellow, Cavard, has got in the back of his head. I'll bet it would be interesting reading, and I'm going to make it my business to find out. Something has been going on to-day, Bob."

"Yes; it is easy to see that. Have you any idea what this secrecy means?"

"Not the slightest in the world."

It was noticed that the red-haired stranger still lingered in town. Steve learned that the man was in frequent communication with certain of the workers in the mine, spending all, or the greater part of his evenings at Cavard's lodgings on Iron Street.

One evening late in the week Rush walked down to the village hotel, where he occasionally went to read the Chicago papers that were kept on file there. He had seated himself at the long, paper-littered table in the deserted reading room and settled himself for a quiet time. He had been reading for some time when he suddenly heard his name spoken.

Glancing up quickly the Iron Boy found himself looking into the florid face of the red-haired man whom he had seen with the Duke.

"Good evening, sir," said Steve innocently, resuming his reading.

"I am glad to make your acquaintance, young man. I have heard all about your heroism at the time of the fire in the mine. It was a brave

piece of work that you and your friend—let's see, what is his name?"

"You mean Bob Jarvis?"

"Yes, that's the name—that you two did."

"Thank you. Let's talk about the weather."

The stranger laughed heartily.

"I see you are a humorist. I expect you will be at the head of a mine yourself one of these fine days."

"I expect to be," answered the lad so quickly as fairly to take the other man's breath away. "That day is a long way off, however."

"Perhaps not so far off as you think. There is a way that men of your ability and mind may improve their conditions."

"May I ask what your business is, sir?"

"I am interested in mines. I am up here on mining business. By the way, I have some of the finest samples of ore that you ever saw."

"Indeed."

Steve was interested in spite of himself.

"Yes; I can show you samples that will interest you greatly. If you have a little time I wish you would come up to my room. We can talk to better advantage there than down here, and besides I can show you the samples without a crowd gathering about us."

"I do not know you, sir," answered the lad, with a half smile.

"My name is Driscold, Barney Driscold. I am from Chicago."

"I am glad to meet you, Mr. Driscold," said Rush, extending his hand. "Under the circumstances I shall be glad to see the ore you speak of. I am always willing to look at anything that will add to my store of knowledge."

"I know that. Come with me. I am interested in young men like you. Where is your friend to-night?"

"He has gone to call on another friend."

Steve rose and started after Driscold. The latter did not pass through the lobby of the hotel, but made his way back through the parlor on the ground floor, opening a door that revealed a stairway leading to the floor above. Steve had never been upstairs in the hotel. He did not even know the arrangement of the rooms up there. He was a shrewd boy, and perhaps he was not so much attracted by the promised exhibition of ore as he was by the idea of learning something about Mr. Driscold.

The latter led him down a hall toward the front of the building, then entered a small, cosy parlor, which he had engaged for his use while in the mining town.

"Have a seat," said Driscold cordially, as he turned on the lights, then drew up a chair close to where Steve Rush had seated himself.

"I guess something is going to start in a short time," thought Steve. "Where are the ore samples, sir?" he asked.

Driscold brought out a handful of specimens of copper ore that he had in his bag. These he laid on the little round table that stood at the side of his chair.

Steve picked up the samples. He saw at once that they were inferior samples, not worthy even of passing consideration.

"Where do these samples come from, sir?" he asked, apparently deeply interested.

"From a new mine over in Michigan. I am interested in the mine and I thought you would be interested in the ore we take from it."

"Yes, sir."

"We have some ideal conditions in the mine. Our men are better paid and have shorter hours than you men have up here. You work ten hours here, while our men work only eight."

"Yes, sir."

"I presume that you would like to have shorter hours and get more money at the same time, would you not?"

"That depends," replied Rush evasively.

"Upon what?"

"Oh, it depends upon several things. In what way do you accomplish this in your new copper mine?"

"By organization purely."

"I don't think I quite understand."

"By organization I mean organizing the working men."

"Oh, you mean holding up one's employers; in other words, throttling them and compelling them to grant one's demands. Is that what you mean?" demanded the lad with sharp incisiveness.

"Oh, no, no, no! You misunderstand me. We do nothing of the sort. We——"

Driscold was interrupted by a rap on the door.

"Come in," he called.

A man stepped into the room. Steve could scarce repress an exclamation as he saw and recognized the newcomer.

"I begin to understand what the game is now," thought the boy, as he leaned back in his chair with a smile of recognition on his face.

CHAPTER IX

THE LABOR LEADER'S LURE

"WHY, Rush, this is, indeed, a surprise," exclaimed the newcomer, who was none other than the Russian, Cavard. "How are you, Driscold? But I fear I am intruding."

"Not at all. Take a seat. We were discussing matters in which you are interested, I know."

"Well, I'm listening," laughed the Russian. "What is the nature of this interesting discussion?"

"We were talking of improving the condition of the miners by organization. My young friend Rush rather misunderstood the purport of my remarks. I was about to show him wherein he was wrong when you entered."

"Yes; I am in thorough sympathy with organization," nodded the Duke. "It is the one needful thing in the mines here, and it is bound to come at no distant day. I am glad we three are alone here, so we can talk the matter over. You know, most of our men lack the intelligence to appreciate fully the kind of argument we are making."

"Do you mean that the miners in our mines are thinking of organizing?" asked Steve, without appearing to take any great interest in the announcement.

"Well, I might say that such a thing is within the range of possibility."

"Form a union?"

"Oh, yes; that would be the natural result. 'In union there is strength,' you know."

"So I have read," replied the lad, with a faint smile. "Then you are unionizing the mines? Is that it?"

"I should hardly want to go so far as to say that, my dear, young friend," answered the Duke. "But I will say that the men have been considering the matter for some time. I am placing implicit confidence in you. This information is not mine to give at the present moment, so I shall have to ask you to consider all that I may say as being confidential."

Steve did not reply to this directly. He sat thoughtful and silent for a few seconds.

"Are you a union man, Mr. Driscold?" he asked suddenly.

"Mr. Driscold is the president of the Central Iron Miners' Association," said Cavard, speaking for the red-haired man.

"Indeed."

Steve regarded the president curiously.

"Then you represent all of the unions in the country, sir?"

"No; not quite that. I am the state president only. The national body is represented by another man. Then, in case a union is organized here, there will be a local president and other officers, all playing a prominent part in the organization. Believe me, my dear young friend, there is a great chance for bright young men. We want young men to hold our offices, young men of brains, like yourself. It is the history of our organization that such young men, almost from the moment that they assume office in the union, make rapid strides in their work. They are sure to earn rapid promotion. We see to that; we push them along. Why, I know of a young man about your age who, like yourself, was a foreman before joining the union. In less than a year after doing so he was promoted to be a superintendent. That happened right in this state, not more than a hundred miles from where we are sitting at this very moment. Stand by the union, and work for its interests, and you will be well taken care of at all times."

"Who are the gainers by the organization of a union?"

"The rank and file of the men, of course."

"But how are the officers paid? Surely they do not work for nothing."

"They are paid very moderate salaries," Mr. Driscold hastened to explain, after which he returned to his original subject. "Are there any other questions that you would like to ask?"

"Yes; I should like to know how all that you promise is brought about. You say that the men will get better wages and shorter hours. How do you expect to accomplish that?"

"I will explain. I see that you do not understand. That is not surprising, since you have had no experience."

"No, sir; I have not."

"I will be very frank with you. Corporations are grasping. They get all they can out of their men, and when those men are no longer useful to them, they cast the men aside as they would a piece of worn-out machinery. They care nothing for you; they would discharge you to-morrow were it not for the fact that you are useful to them."

"I think you are wrong, sir," retorted Steve sharply. "I have never worked for a corporation before. The corporation I am now working for is interested in me to the same extent that I am interested in my work. I believe all of these great industrial organizations are looking for young men who are in earnest. I believe that they are willing to advance such young men just as fast as they are fitted for advancement.

At least I have found that to be so in my own case. Of course we have to work long hours and work hard. But what do you expect? Surely you do not look for pay for doing nothing?"

"No, no; you misunderstand me entirely."

"I beg your pardon. You were starting to tell me how you brought about the conditions you mentioned a few moments ago."

"Yes. In the first place, the corporations like to have their men organized. It makes for better service all around. Well, to proceed, I will explain that, having organized, we should appoint a committee to wait upon the official who is in charge of the mines. This committee would lay before the superintendent, if he were the man called upon, such grievances as we might think existed. There would be a friendly discussion, and he, seeing the wisdom of what our committee demanded, would no doubt grant the request made."

"What if he refused?" interjected Steve.

"I presume it would go before the president of the mining company. At least, we should see that the grievances were carried to him."

"And if he refused to grant your demands, what then?" persisted Steve Rush, his keen eyes fixed upon the red-headed president of the Association.

"Well, we should find a way to compel them to grant our demands," answered Mr. Driscold significantly.

"It seems to come back to the point of throttling a man," said Rush. "I never could become enthusiastic over the profession of highwayman, and it strikes me that this is about what the proposition amounts to."

The Iron Boy was pitting his wits against those of two shrewd and experienced men, who were seeking to lure him on by offering him sugar-coated pills. But Steve Rush knew full well, young as he was in the world's ways, that the inside of the pill was bitter and unpalatable. The lad was holding his own to such an extent that the man Driscold had adopted a sharp, incisive tone at several points in the discussion.

"You are wrong, Rush," interrupted Cavard. "You are altogether wrong."

"Perhaps I am, but I am trying to get to the bottom of the question. You spoke, Mr. Driscold, a moment ago, of finding a way to compel the officials of the company to agree to your demands. How would you go about it?"

The president hesitated a moment before replying.

"Why, our only recourse then—our only remedy, in that event—would be to call a strike."

"*Ah!*"

The exclamation escaped young Rush almost before he realized it. He bit his lips, and his face flushed slightly.

"And while the strike was on your men and their families would go hungry?"

"Oh, no; we look out for that. We give them money."

"How much?"

"Enough."

"How much?" persisted Steve.

"A few dollars a week, perhaps, so long as the money holds out."

"Who gets the money that the men who join pay in?"

"The dues go to the union, of course. The initiation fee naturally goes to recompense the walking delegate who, you must understand, works without pay."

"It strikes me that he is pretty well paid. I have not had much experience in the world, gentlemen, but I am satisfied that your whole scheme is wrong. It is a hold-up game from start to finish——"

"You're a fool!" exploded Driscold. "You're a——"

"Never mind the trimmings. I may be all you accuse me of, but I pride myself on possessing common sense. That, sometimes, is

worth more than knowledge. Mr. Cavard, are you helping to unionize the mines here?"

"Whatever I am doing is done wholly in the interest of the rank and file of the mines," snapped Cavard. "You are making a mistake in antagonizing us in this way. We had hoped that you would see the matter in its true light, and that you might prove a valuable aid to us."

"In what way?" demanded Steve.

"You are popular with the men; you have a great deal of influence with them, even though you are a boy. We had hoped that you might enter into the plan and accept an important office in the union."

"So that's it, eh?"

"That is what we had hoped. Think it over. Say nothing to anyone, but go over the matter carefully, and I am sure you will change your mind. Meet us here to-morrow night at eight o'clock and give us your answer. You have everything to gain and nothing to lose."

"Gentlemen, there is no necessity of waiting until to-morrow night. I can give you my answer now. I want nothing to do with such crooked business as you have proposed to me to-night. I bid you good night, gentlemen."

Steve Rush rose and left the room without another word.

CHAPTER X

THE GENTLEMAN IN THE WOODPILE

"BOB, I've torn down the woodpile," announced Steve, as he entered their room at the boarding house half an hour later.

"What woodpile?" demanded Jarvis blankly.

"The one we have been guessing about; and I've found the black gentleman who has been in hiding there."

"You don't mean that you have solved the mystery?"

"I have."

"Well, you are a wonder. Tell me about it."

"They are trying to unionize the mines."

"You don't say! Who is trying to do it?"

"Cavard is at the bottom of the whole business, I believe. He has with him the president of the Central Iron Miners' Association and they are putting up this job together, though I believe the Duke is the real man."

"So that's the game, is it?"

"It is."

"How did you chance to learn all this?"

Steve related what had occurred in the reading room of the hotel, telling his companion how

he had been lured to Driscold's room on the pretext of looking over some samples of ore, and where they were soon joined by the Duke.

"What did they want of you?" questioned Jarvis.

"They wanted me to join the union, of course. They wanted me to use my influence with the men, promising me quick promotion if I did join in and help them to organize."

"What did you tell them?"

"I don't remember all I said, but I made it clear that I wanted none of it. I am satisfied that this union business is a delusion and a snare. Mr. Carrhart talked with me quite a little on that subject when he was up here some months ago. He gave me a lot of points about the methods followed by some of these union organizers, and he showed me what miserable things strikes are."

"Yes; I guess they are pretty bad," agreed Jarvis. "I have never seen one."

"And I hope you never will. I don't believe a strike could ever benefit either employé or employer. Don't you get mixed up with them, Bob."

"Not I," answered Jarvis with emphasis. "I'm pretty well satisfied with the way I am being used. I've learned a lot of things in the past year, and most of them I have learned from

you. I'm very much obliged for the licking you gave me. You hammered some sense into my head and I haven't lost all of it yet. When I do, you may give me another walloping."

"I'm afraid I should not be able to do it now. You have grown since then, Bob."

"So have you."

"Then we are in good shape to thrash somebody else, if the occasion demands, eh?"

"You bet! We'll do that, all right. Do you think there is going to be trouble?"

"I should not be surprised. I do not know, of course, how far this thing has gone, but the organizers have been working for a long time, as you and I both know. I am inclined to believe that the Duke has gotten a strong hold on the men. You observed how our fellows acted after they returned from their outing on Sunday?"

"Yes; I noticed it. They all acted as if they had lost their week's wages. So that's what was going on, eh?"

"Yes; they must have had a meeting out at the lake. I wish I knew whether they have organized or not. I am inclined to believe that they have not, though. But, if not, they are getting perilously close to doing so."

"Should we not tell Mr. Penton?"

"I had thought of that, but we talked this

matter over once before and decided not to do so. He probably knows more about what is going on than we do. However, if we see it is going on to a finish, perhaps it would be our duty to give him a hint of what we know. I dislike to carry tales of any kind. Again, I doubt if this is any of our business. We know what we shall do; we'll fight the proposed union at every opportunity if the men are going to strike. I believe it would be the worst thing that could happen to the men, short of a mine disaster, and the company, to which we owe full allegiance, would suffer greatly."

"What are the men going to do when they become organized?" asked Bob.

"Judging from what the two men said, I should judge they would demand higher wages and shorter hours."

Bob uttered a grunt of disapproval.

"Next thing we know they'll be wanting the bosses to lay them off and pay them double wages while they are off. I never saw anything like the cheek of some people."

"The laboring man is entitled to some consideration," mused Steve. "But there is a limit. We will lie low and attend to our own business until something else develops."

Something did develop later in the week. The word had been passed quietly about that there

was to be a meeting of the miners of the day shift to take up the question of organizing. The meeting was to be held in a bowling alley over the only livery stable in the place. Only those were invited of whom the organizers were sure.

Bob Jarvis got wind of the meeting through overhearing two of the men in his shift discussing it. He told Steve at the first opportunity. The latter thought over the matter all the rest of the day.

"Bob," he said, that night, "I am going to attend that meeting. Will you come along?"

"Where you go, I go," answered Jarvis, laughingly. "But won't they put us out?"

"I guess not. If they do, it won't help their cause any. They will be glad to have us there if they think they can convert us. At least, we shall know what is going on, and we may be able to do something for the company."

"Do what?"

"I don't know. We shall see," Steve replied enigmatically. "Leave it to me. Don't do anything rash, but let me engineer this thing. I may bring trouble down upon my head, but I have an idea."

Bob agreed to "be good." The meeting was scheduled to be held that night, and nine o'clock was the appointed hour.

The boys delayed their walk that evening.

They did not leave the house until long after eight o'clock, by which time nearly all the men from the boarding house had dressed themselves in their best and hurried away.

"You see, they are all going to attend the meeting," nodded Rush. "That shows you how far this thing has advanced."

"It certainly looks that way. I didn't think it was anything like this, did you, Steve?"

"No; I did not. We had better be starting now."

On the way the lads were hailed by Mr. Penton.

"Where are you going in such a hurry, lads?" he called.

"We are going out for the evening," answered Steve. "I have been thinking about labor unions to-day, Mr. Penton. Are you opposed to them? Are they a factor for good or otherwise?"

The superintendent laughed.

"Older heads than yours have disagreed on that subject. I hold rather pronounced views. There are unions that are ably managed by upright, intelligent men. Such unions are a good thing. The difficulty is that many others are managed by unscrupulous men, working to serve only their own ends, no matter what the cost to the employer. Such unions are a menace,

both to the men and to their employers. That is my position."

"Then, Mr. Penton, if you were to have a union, say in your mines here, honestly managed and directed by upright men, you would not object to it?"

"Most assuredly not."

This was a new point of view for Steve Rush. It gave him a broader insight into the question.

"Are you thinking of organizing a union, my boy?" asked the superintendent, with a smile.

"Well, not exactly, sir. If I were to join a union would it prejudice you against me?"

"Not at all. I know you—know your honesty too well. It would be a good thing for any union to have such men as yourself and Jarvis with it."

"Thank you, sir," answered Steve.

The boys bade the superintendent good-bye and went on their way to the meeting place.

"What in the world did all those questions of yours mean?" demanded Bob after they had gotten out of ear shot of the superintendent.

Steve did not answer. He was thinking deeply.

"You have something in mind, Steve Rush."

"Yes, I have, Bob. In fact, I have partially changed my mind."

"About what have you changed your mind?"

"I will tell you later."

Reaching the hall where the meeting was to be held, the chums found the place packed with miners. As the boys made their way to the rear of the room, where they saw an unoccupied window seat, the miners recognized them and set up a loud cheer.

Driscold and Cavard occupied seats on the platform. The men exchanged significant glances when they saw the boys enter the hall. They were not quite sure whether they approved the presence of the Iron Boys. But, in view of the attitude taken by the miners, the two men could not well object to Steve and Bob remaining.

Mr. Driscold soon after called the meeting to order. He stated very briefly the purpose of the organization, which was, in short, he said, to guard the men from oppression and to look out for their general welfare. He gave figures to show how many of the miners of the country already belonged to unions, and urged the men to form a union before leaving the hall.

"How many of you are in favor of doing this?" he demanded. "All in favor will rise."

Nearly every man in the hall rose to his feet, though the Iron Boys sat quietly in their places.

Next Mr. Driscold proposed Mr. Cavard for president of the local union, which was to in-

clude all the mines on the range, and from all of which representatives were present. Cavard was elected unanimously. Steve caught the faint flicker of a smile as it swept over the face of the Duke. Rush nudged his companion.

"The next thing," continued Mr. Driscold, "will be the election of a secretary. This should be done before any other business is transacted. After that you will all sign your names to the roll. I have a charter already made out for you. Who will you have for your secretary?"

"Steve Rush!" shouted a voice.

"Rush, Rush, Rush!" shouted voices from all parts of the hall, until the demand became one insistent roar.

"I move we elect Steve Rush our secretary," cried a man, springing to a chair.

"Second the motion!"

Driscold, rather red of face, rapped for order.

"It has been moved and seconded that Stephen Rush be elected as secretary of this organization. I will not attempt to advise you. It is for you to say whom you desire to fill your offices. But be sure that you make no mistake. Rush may be a most estimable young man, but you must remember that he is young."

"Not so young that he didn't save the lives of a lot of the men," cried one.

"Rush, Rush, Rush!" roared the miners.

"All in favor will rise," announced Driscold.

He plainly showed his irritation, as did Cavard. The meeting had taken a turn that they did not like. Still, the organizers had won. Affairs were practically in their own hands.

Every man in the room sprang to his feet, shouting for the Iron Boy.

"Young Rush is unanimously elected," announced Driscold. "The newly elected officers will take their places."

Cavard took the chair. At that moment several men swooped down toward the place where the boys were sitting.

Bob Jarvis was so amazed that for a moment he did not speak.

"What are you going to do, Steve?" he stammered.

"I am going to accept," announced the lad in a determined tone.

"You—you are going to join the union?"

"Yes; I am going to join the union. I would suggest that you do the same. I have changed my mind, old chap, and I'll tell you why later."

The miners grabbed Steve, hoisted him to their shoulders and bore him to the platform, where they set him down in a chair at the table placed for the secretary.

CHAPTER XI

RUSH SCORES HEAVILY

"I AM glad you have thought better of it, young man," said Cavard, leaning over and shaking Rush by the hand.

Steve did not reply. His face was flushed, his lips compressed. He had evidently decided upon some course of action that was not wholly pleasing to him. He glanced up sharply. Driscold was speaking.

"It is not usual for one man to hold two offices, but you will agree with me that there is one man among us who is peculiarly fitted for the office of walking delegate. He will always work in our interest, if you choose him to fill the second office. I refer to Mr. Cavard, your new president."

The Duke was elected walking delegate with great enthusiasm, Steve Rush and Bob Jarvis being the only men in the room to vote against the proposition. Cavard was smiling to cover his annoyance at the marked way in which the boys had opposed him. He flashed a malignant glance at them, which both lads pretended not to observe. But they knew that they had made an enemy of the new walking delegate.

Other officers were elected; men in every instance who could be easily handled by the one at the head of the new organization. This having been done, the president asked if any member had anything to say, or a suggestion to make, before they proceeded to the signing of the roll.

No one spoke. Each was waiting for the other. In fact, none of the men in the hall had a very definite idea as to what he did want. They were already in the hands of their leaders.

Steve Rush rose slowly to his feet. Every eye was instantly fixed upon him.

"Great Cæsar, he's going to spout!" muttered Bob Jarvis. "Well, if this doesn't beat anything I ever heard of in my life! A few hours ago Steve was roasting the union, and now he's a red-hot member of one. I wonder what he's got up his sleeve? He's up to something, that's sure."

"My friends," began the lad, with perfect confidence in himself, for he had been the prize orator of his class in the high school, "I am only a boy——"

"No you ain't; you're a full-grown man!" shouted several voices at once.

"As I said, I am only a boy, but you know I am your friend, and all of you are my friends. I had not intended to join this organization,

but after thinking the matter over I decided that it was my duty to do so. I had a feeling that I might be able to help you, though perhaps not in the way that some of your leaders might suggest——"

Cavard rapped loudly with his fist on the table.

"You are out of order, Mr. Secretary. I am sorry, but we have too much business ahead of us to permit of our wasting time in idle talk. The hour is getting late, and as it is the first duty of your presiding officer to look out for your well being, I would suggest that we finish our business so that you may all get home to your needed rest."

Steve was standing, half turned toward Cavard, holding the latter with a steady gaze.

"No, no; let him talk. We want to hear what he has to say. Go on, Rush; we're going to hear you out, even if we don't get home till morning."

"You may speak for two minutes," announced Cavard. There was no smile on his face now. Matters were taking an unexpected turn, and one that he did not like at all. This boy was having things too much his own way, and the Duke made a mental resolve to check Steve effectually before another meeting was called.

"Go on, Rush; go on!"

The lad turned facing his audience again, undisturbed by the interruption.

"As I was saying, I am your friend and you are mine. I have had no experience with unions. Perhaps others of you have. But I want to warn you not to be carried away by promises. Use your own best judgment on all matters. Let your union mean your uplifting. Don't use the power of your union for any wrong purpose. If you have a grievance at any time, talk it over calmly; look on both sides of every question. Do not let your leaders influence you against your better judgment——"

"I protest against this line of talk," cried Cavard angrily, rising and pounding on the table. "It is treason, men."

"Men, it is *not* treason! I am your friend," answered Steve, addressing the audience. "Hear me out, then I will sit down. I believe that our employers have our best interests at heart. That I believe to be true so far as our own mines are concerned. Of course I am not so familiar with conditions in the independent mines represented here. Those of you who represent other mines will have to be the judges of that. You will find your employers are willing, at all times, to meet you half way and discuss any grievance, fancied or real, that you may

have. Consult them freely; take them into your confidence and be guided by their advice and your own good sense. As for myself, I shall stand shoulder to shoulder with you when I believe you are in the right, but against you if I believe you are not. I want to thank you for electing me to the office of secretary. If, at any time, you think I am not the man for the place, I shall take no offence if you select someone else. That is all I have to say at present."

When he sat down there was silence in the room for a moment; then the miners broke out in a loud cheer.

"You're all right, Steve. You bet we don't want anyone else. You've got a head on your shoulders. You——"

Cavard rapped for order.

"I am afraid you men are being carried away by schoolboy eloquence. You must listen to the reason, born of long experience, of your leaders. They will guide you in the right path."

"I move that we proceed to the signing of the roll and adjourn," said Steve, rising quickly.

Bob seconded the motion and it was carried without waiting for the formality of having it put by the chairman.

Cavard was thoroughly angry. He tried hard to conceal his displeasure, but the threatening expression of his face betrayed his inward rage.

He had been outdone by a boy. His well-laid plans had been turned until they were as a sharp knife against his own throat. He was perfectly willing that the meeting should be adjourned, for there was no telling what this keen, resourceful lad might propose next.

The moment the meeting was ended the two lads slipped from the room, for the hour was late and they were anxious to get home and to bed. They had reached the street when a hand was laid roughly on Steve's shoulder, turning the boy half way about.

"What do you mean, you young whelp?" demanded Cavard. "You came here to-night to make trouble. You wanted to break up the meeting, but your plan didn't work, did it?"

"You are mistaken, sir; I wanted to do nothing of the sort."

"You did; you *know* you did. You had it all fixed to be put in as secretary and——"

"If there was any fixing, Mr. Cavard, it was not on my side of the house," retorted Rush sharply.

"Do you mean to insinuate that I——"

"Oh, no; I am not insinuating. I was merely stating a fact."

The Duke's face was distorted with rage. He was making a great effort to control himself, but was only partially successful. It was not ad-

visable to have an open rupture with Steve, for the latter might do his cause serious harm, considering the boy's influence over the miners, which appeared to be almost equal to that of the walking delegate and president of the union.

"You are a traitor to the union!"

"Be careful, sir," warned the lad.

"See here, Mister Man, don't you go to handing out any loose language around here," spoke up Bob Jarvis in a belligerent tone. "We don't stand for any of that kind of talk, you know."

"Then be careful that you don't do something that you will be sorry for," retorted the Duke. "I know a thing or two about what you fellows are up to, and let me tell you that the union won't stand for it by a long shot! First thing you know you will be out in the cold; you'll lose your jobs and you will find that it will be rather difficult to get others in these parts."

"Is that a threat?" demanded Rush.

"You may construe it as you wish."

"Very well——"

"Tut, tut; what's this?" demanded the man Driscold, who had come up in time to overhear the last remarks. "This won't do at all. Harmony is what we want in the union, and harmony is what we must have. What is the difficulty here?"

"There is no difficulty so far as we are con-

cerned," replied Rush. "Mr. Cavard is a little excited, that's all. He will feel better to-morrow. Good night."

The boys turned away abruptly and started for home.

"Now, Steve Rush, will you please tell me what all this means?" demanded Jarvis after they had reached their room. "What on earth ever possessed you to join the union after you had been roasting it so hard?"

"I had my reasons, Bob."

"Yes; I suppose you had."

"I joined the union because I believed I could be useful to it, and to our employers as well, and that is the purpose that *you* must have in view."

"You don't mean that you and I are going to be spies and report everything to Mr. Penton, do you? If that's the case, you may count me out."

"Certainly not. You ought to know me better than that. What sort of speech did I make?"

"Say, it was a dandy! I didn't think it was in you. You ought to have seen how those fellows hung on every word. They were sitting forward on the edges of their seats, every man of them."

"Except Cavard and Driscold," laughed Steve. "I rather think *they* were on the anxious

seat. Well, we shall see. But be careful that Cavard does not draw you into an argument that will cause you to lose your temper. I have an idea he will try to do so, unless he thinks better of it and tries some other plan. I believe that man is a crook, Bob Jarvis. I may be doing him a wrong. If so, time will tell. In the meantime, we shall do what we can for the union. I hope Mr. Penton will not lose confidence in us. He may misunderstand our motive. If he does, we shall have to stand it; that's all."

"It may be the means of losing our jobs," suggested Jarvis.

Steve was thoughtful.

"I may have done wrong, but I did what I believed to be best. Out of the union we should not have so much influence with the men. In it we shall be able to do many things for both sides, being loyal to each."

"We're going to try to please everyone—is that it?" grinned Bob.

"If we are able to do it," replied Steve earnestly.

"How are we going to explain our action to Mr. Penton?"

"I shall not try to do so."

"But if he asks?" persisted Bob.

"I can't answer that beforehand. My answers must depend upon circumstances."

The boys turned in soon after that, but Steve Rush lay awake for a long time, thinking over the events of the evening. He was wondering whether he had done right; wondering whether the officials of the company, who had been so kind to him, would misconstrue his motives and no longer take their former keen interest in him.

"I've done the best I know how, and I'm not done yet," muttered the boy, as he turned over, buried his head in the pillow and tried to go to sleep.

CHAPTER XII

MINERS MEET IN SECRET

"WELL, Steve, I hear you joined the new union last night," said Mr. Penton, halting in the drift where Rush was directing some changes in the work of his shift.

The Iron Boy flushed.

"Yes, sir. I hope you have no objection to my having done so."

"Not in the least. We have nothing to fear from such upright men as you in the union. I wish they were all of the same calibre. I want to thank you for the speech you made last night. Such words do much toward steering the men in the right direction. I may say that I am very glad you decided to join."

"I had decided not to do so, until I met and talked with you before going to the meeting last evening."

"How so?"

"You gave me a new point of view. I decided that it was my duty to join and I did so. Do you think Mr. Carrhart will mind when he hears of it?"

"He knows all about it now. He knew that the meeting was going to take place, perhaps

even before you learned of it," answered the superintendent, with a twinkle in his eyes. "Of course that is confidential, you understand."

"Certainly, sir."

"You may be sure that when he understands the circumstances he will offer no objections. I know all about what took place last night, and I heartily approve of your part in it. We have means of knowing what is going on in our mines. We have to do these things for our own protection."

"Yes, sir."

Steve felt much more light of heart after this conversation. That his superiors approved of his action in joining the union relieved him of a great weight.

By this time the mine had been whipped into working condition once more, and the work was going on with renewed vigor. The men, too, with the promises of the labor leaders still fresh in their minds, went about their duties much more cheerfully than before.

However, there were, if anything, more meetings than before. There were conferences outside of the mine that the Iron Boys knew nothing about. Neither did Mr. Penton have knowledge of these secret meetings, in spite of the detective organization that existed in the mines unknown to the miners themselves. Cavard himself did

not appear to be active, but there were others who were active for him.

Ten days had passed, then another meeting of the union was held. There were not more than twenty of the members present. The young secretary was among the absentees.

Cavard called the meeting to order, commenting upon the small attendance. Then he made a speech in which he indulged in some plain talk regarding the purpose of the union. After he had done so he said:

"There is another matter that I wish to bring before the members. That is the question of our secretary. He is a most estimable young man, but you—those of you who listened to his remarks the other night—will agree with me that he is too young, too inexperienced to be entrusted with so important an office. It should be quite plain to you that he is not in thorough sympathy with our great work. In other words, I believe that he is the tool of the bosses. I have good reason for saying this, though for obvious reasons I hope my words will not be repeated. One of our members saw the boy, Rush, in earnest conversation with the superintendent down in the Red Rock Mine to-day, and overheard something that aroused his suspicion. Rush was reporting some of our private business. What do you think of that?"

A murmur arose from the audience. Cavard waited that the full force of his words might take effect.

"He's a traitor!" shouted a voice.

"I should not want to say that, men. I should call him an irresponsible boy, who is serving the purposes of the bosses without being fully aware that he is doing so. Of course the matter is in your hands to dispose of as you may see fit."

"Put him out!" shouted one of the members.

"Down with all traitors!" cried another.

"Mr. President, this is a serious charge that you have made against our secretary," said an elderly miner. "You are quite sure that he is a traitor to the union?"

"Quite sure."

"Then what would you suggest?"

"As I have already said, I do not believe the boy is so much to blame, but the effect is the same as if he were a traitor in reality."

"What shall we do?"

"You might, if you saw fit, choose another secretary," purred the Russian.

"Yes; that is what should be done under the circumstances. But is such an act in order?"

"Oh, yes. Charges can be preferred against him. We have as yet no by-laws. Some one might make a motion to depose him, if you think

best, embodying the charges in that motion; then we can proceed to choose another secretary," urged the chairman. "The matter is in your hands, gentlemen," he added, rubbing his palms together. "It is not for me to suggest."

"Who would you put in his place?"

"It is not for me to say, but some such man as Mike Caldert might make an excellent secretary."

The motion, as suggested by Cavard, who would not suggest, was made and quickly carried. Then Mike Caldert was duly elected as the permanent secretary of the organization.

A gleam of satisfaction shone in the eyes of the Russian. He had triumphed over the Iron Boy, thus effectually disposing of him, as he believed. Cavard was a shrewd and unscrupulous man, and one who would stop at nothing to accomplish his ends, as Steve was presently to learn.

This matter having been disposed of, the president and walking delegate cleared his throat and began on a new subject that claimed the attention of the men at once.

"There is another matter, and one of great importance to every man in every mine on the range," he began. "That is the question of pay and of hours. We are working ten hours

a day and we are getting less money than is paid by the other mines in the country."

This statement was not true, but the members present were not aware of the fact. They took all that Cavard said as the truth.

"It is time," he continued, "for us to take action in the matter. You should formulate your demands and present them to the owners for their consideration. The bosses are making money. There never has been a time in the history of the mines when they were making so much money. Your tonnage is increasing day by day, and day by day you are doing more work. But let me ask you, do your wages increase proportionately? Do you work fewer hours than before?"

"No!" shouted a voice.

"Do you share in the profits that you are piling up for the money kings?"

"No! You're right, we don't."

"Then if that is so, why is it so? It is because those who employ you are squeezing the lemon until it is dry, in order that their bank accounts may grow fat. Take the matter into your own hands——"

"We will, we will! How shall we do it?"

The men had become worked up to a high pitch of excitement over their leader's words, which had been skilfully chosen. He had

touched the men in a spot where he knew they were the weakest. He had sown the seed that was destined to produce a bountiful crop of bitter weeds, and Cavard, president and walking delegate, smiled complacently behind the hand that he drew across his mouth after having delivered himself of the words.

"How shall we go about it?" repeated one of the men.

"I have here a few notes that I drew up hastily. They form a demand upon our employers for an eight-hour day and a fifty-cent rise for full miners, and twenty-five cents for miners' helpers and all grades below that. It is a most moderate demand. The owners will grant it, you will find, knowing as they do that the power of the union is behind you. I will appoint a committee to formulate the demands set down here. Then we will name a further committee to call upon the superintendent and present these demands."

Cavard named a committee of three, to whom he passed over, not merely notes, as he had said, but a formal paper drawn up in detail, embodying the facts as stated by him.

The committee went through the form of touching up the document, making a mark here and there with a pen and discussing the paper. Finally they announced their task finished.

"When shall we present our demands to the superintendent?" asked the president.

"Right away," answered the members.

"Then I will appoint five of our number to call upon the superintendent to-morrow. Your chairman, of course, will head the committee as its leader. We will make an appointment to see Mr. Penton at his office to-morrow evening at eight o'clock, if he will see us, and I think he will," added Cavard. "I want all of those present to bear witness that this has been a regular meeting. You all received your notices to be present this evening, did you not?"

"We did."

"And you are prepared to give evidence, if necessary, that everything has been done in due form?"

"We are."

"Then, if there is nothing more to come before the members, a motion to adjourn will be in order."

A motion to adjourn was made and carried, and the members left the meeting place, Cavard retaining the papers embodying the demands to be made on the company.

Steve Rush, all unconscious of what had been done, was sound asleep in his bed. But a surprise was awaiting him on the following day that would set him thinking harder than ever.

CHAPTER XIII

STEVE'S SUSPICIONS AROUSED

"ARE you going to the meeting to-night?" asked a foreman of a shift, pausing at Steve Rush's main drift.

"Why, yes, of course; aren't you?"

"I guess so. I hear there will be something doing to-night."

This conversation took place on the day following the meeting at which Cavard had so successfully outwitted his young opponents and had carried the meeting through in accordance with his own ideas. As yet neither Steve nor Bob had heard of the meeting. They, with others of their fellows, had received cards that morning saying, "There will be a special meeting of the union this evening at the usual time and place."

The cards were undated and they had not thought to look at the post mark, taking for granted that the meeting was to be held on the evening of that day.

"There ain't going to be any meeting to-night," volunteered a miner who had overheard the conversation.

"Yes, there is. Here is the card saying that

there will be," answered Rush, exhibiting the card he had received that morning.

"Naw; no such thing. The meeting was *last* night," continued the miner. "Ain't you heard about it?"

Steve looked at the fellow to see if he were joking. He saw that the man was in earnest.

"There was a meeting of the union last night?"

"Sure there was."

"How do you know?"

"Friend of mine was there and told me about it. And you ain't heard about it?"

"I certainly have not. What was done?"

"A lot of things was done."

"That's queer. My postal notifying me of the meeting did not reach me until this morning. When did you get yours?" asked the lad of the foreman with whom he had been talking.

"I got mine this morning, too."

"That explains it, then; but it is odd that no one said anything about it yesterday."

"Probably didn't get their cards till after supper last night. Well, I guess we didn't miss much," added the foreman, with a grin.

"You haven't told us what was done," said Steve.

"Well, for one thing, they elected a new secretary. Didn't you know about that?"

Rush peered at the man keenly.

"See here, Abe, are you joking?"

"Naw, I ain't joking. They bounced you and elected another man in your place."

Steve could scarcely believe his own ears.

"Why did they do that?"

"I don't know. I didn't ask. But they bounced you, all right, all right."

"May I ask who my successor is?" inquired the lad, with a touch of sarcasm in his voice.

"I don't know. I didn't ask that, either."

"What do you think of that?" demanded the boy, turning to the foreman.

"I don't believe it. They wouldn't be such fools as to do a thing like that."

"I am of the opinion that something was done there, and it seems mighty queer to me. Have you seen Cavard to-day?"

"Yes; I passed him when I was coming over here. He must be somewhere hereabouts now. We'll walk out, and maybe we shall meet him," said the foreman.

The two men made their way out of the drift together. Steve was silent and thoughtful. He did not like this thing that he had heard, nor did he know what to make of it.

They did not find the Duke at once, but half an hour later Steve came across the walking delegate near the ore rise on the twentieth level.

"Oh, Mr. Cavard," he called.

"Yes, Rush; what is it?"

"I hear you had a meeting last night."

"We did. Why were you not there?"

"Because I knew nothing about it."

"But you received a notice, did you not?"

"This morning, yes. I supposed from the card that the meeting was to be held to-night. I understand others did not receive theirs until to-day, either."

"Then that accounts for the small attendance," answered Cavard smoothly. "The cards were mailed rather late, but it was quite important to hold a meeting last night. I wondered why so few were present. It was most unfortunate, for very important business was transacted."

"So I heard. May I ask what was done?"

"Several things were attended to," replied the man evasively.

"Including the election of a new secretary?"

"Well, yes; I believe so."

Cavard showed some slight irritation under the sharp questioning of the Iron Boy.

"Why?"

The question came out with a snap.

"You should have attended the meeting if you want to know what was done. We are not supposed to talk about it on the outside."

"Yes; no doubt I should have attended, but I did not for the reason I have just given. Why was I deposed and another put in my place?"

"Well, to be candid with you, since you insist, the members did not think you were old enough, nor that you had had experience enough to warrant keeping you in such an important position. You see, they chose you in a moment of intense enthusiasm. After they had thought the matter over more calmly they came to the conclusion that it would be better to have an older man for the place, so they elected another."

"Who?"

"Mr. Caldert."

"Mike Caldert?"

"Yes."

Steve laughed uproariously.

"Why, that man can barely write his name. I'll wager he cannot write correctly the name of the state in which he lives."

"I think you are mistaken," replied the walking delegate, drawing himself up frigidly. "At least I have nothing to do with that. It was the will of the meeting, and there was nothing for me to do but to put to vote the motions that were offered."

Steve surveyed the walking delegate with a sarcastic look on his face.

"Has Caldert the minutes of the meeting, or have you?"

"I believe he has them."

"Then I shall demand to see them to-night. I want to know what was done at that meeting, and I think I have a right to know. I shall bring the matter before the next meeting and find out whether you have the right to railroad through a piece of business like this. It's not that I care a rap about holding the office, but I don't propose to be done out of it in any such way without finding out what it all means."

Cavard saw possibilities of trouble.

"Don't be a baby. Take your medicine like a man. You are proving that you are not fitted for an office in the union yet. When you get older and have had more experience, then perhaps you may do."

There was an implied sneer in the man's tone, which his smiling face failed to mask.

"Indeed! I shall bring the subject before the next full meeting of the union, just the same, and we shall see whether it will stand or not.

"Look here, young man!"

The walking delegate dropped his mask of assumed politeness. His chin was thrust forward and his eyes gleamed with anger.

"I've been too easy with you—easy because you are a boy. Now I'm done with this foolish-

ness. This is a man's game, and men are going to play it. You can get out of the union if you want to; we don't need you. But let me tell you one thing: you mind your own business after this, if you know what's good for you! I'm running this union just now, and I'm running it in the way that suits me best—that means the right way. If you don't like it, you get out and shut up—that's all."

Steve laughed in the delegate's face.

"Now you are beginning to show yourself in your true colors, Mister Man. I don't want your office. I did not care in the first place to have anything to do with an organization that you were interested in, but I thought possibly it might be run by honest men, so I joined the union."

"What's that? You throw that at me—you accuse me of being dishonest, you young whelp?" shouted Cavard in a rage.

"Take what I said for what it's worth, and I repeat your own words: 'If you don't like it, get out and shut up.' That's my answer."

Steve snapped his fingers in the face of the walking delegate and turned on his heel. Cavard was at his side in a few quick, long strides. He gripped the collar of the Iron Boy and was about to spin him about when Steve turned on him.

"Unless you are looking for trouble, I wouldn't put hands on the other man in this instance, if I were you. If you do that again, you will answer for it."

"Indeed! And may I ask you if you are in authority here?" sneered Cavard.

"Well, all I have to say is, if you want to know who's boss on this shift, just start something. You'll find out mighty quick, and the knowledge may not be particularly pleasant to you, either. That's all I have to say to you to-day. I may have something further to say later. Good afternoon."

Rush left the walking delegate fuming in the drift as he walked away. The Iron Boy made it his business to ask every man he met whether or not he had received a notification of the meeting of the previous evening. Some of them had received their notices that morning, others had received no notice whatever. Not one of the miners had gotten his card on the previous day, so far as the lad could learn.

Steve was determined to get to the bottom of the matter. He consulted with Bob Jarvis and the latter proposed looking up the walking delegate at once and giving him a sound thrashing.

"No, Bob, we don't know that he is to blame in this matter at all, though I have my suspicions. Even if we were sure, we should gain

nothing by following that course. There, I forgot to ask him what else was done at the meeting. After we get off duty to-night we must find out what has been going on. I'll see you and talk it over later."

As soon as he had finished his work in the mine Rush went directly over to the post-office, where he waited until the postmaster was at leisure, when he called him aside.

"I received a postal card to-day that I should have had last night," said the lad, producing the notification of the meeting and handing it to the postmaster.

"What did you say?" exclaimed the postmaster.

"I said I should have received this post card last night," repeated Steve. "You see it is quite important. It is a notification of a meeting and the meeting was held last night."

"I don't see how you could very well have received this postal last night, when it wasn't mailed until this morning."

"Not mailed until this morning?" demanded the lad, in well-feigned surprise.

"No, sir."

"Are you sure of that?"

"I ought to be. These postals—there were a lot of them—were stuffed in through the slot in the door some time during the night. It must

have been late, for we didn't close until nearly twelve o'clock. The postals were all on the floor when I opened up the place this morning."

"Did you read any of the postals?" asked Steve innocently.

"Oh, yes, I always read postals. Don't have much of anything else to do part of the day, you know," replied the postmaster in a matter-of-fact tone. "Why, what's in the wind? No trouble about it, is there?"

"There may be," replied the lad mysteriously. "But if you will state the facts when called upon to do so, there will be no trouble so far as you are concerned. Will you do that?"

"Yes; I'll do that, all right. It won't violate any regulation of the department that I know of."

"Thank you. Say nothing to anyone of what I have asked you to-night, please."

"I think I have got something on our friend, the walking delegate, now," muttered the lad triumphantly, as he made his way toward home. He had gone but a short distance when he met five of the members of the union, all dressed in their best, hurrying along the street.

Steve halted and peered at them suspiciously.

"Hello, where are you fellows going?" he demanded.

"To the superintendent's office."

"What for?"

"We are going to present our demands. You know the document we decided to present to him to-day?"

Steve did not know, but he did not say so.

"You are going there now?"

"Yes; Mr. Cavard is going to meet us there at eight o'clock. We are the committee. You lost your secretary job last night. That's what comes of being too fresh," jeered the speaker.

"So that's the game, is it?" muttered Steve. "I should like to be present at that committee meeting. And I'm going to be there, too," he added, after a moment's reflection. "They can do no more than put me out."

CHAPTER XIV

MINERS MAKE DEMANDS

"YOU go on about your business. You do not belong with this committee," snapped Cavard as the Iron Boy joined them at the entrance to the superintendent's office, where the meeting was to take place.

"If the superintendent doesn't wish to see me I will leave. You have no business to give me orders, so attend to your own affairs, if you will be so good."

The lad slipped in behind the others and stood near the door of the private office, where, with the others, he was awaiting the arrival of Mr. Penton. The latter entered very shortly afterwards.

"Well, gentlemen, what can I do for you this evening?" questioned the executive smilingly.

Cavard cleared his throat, assuming his most suave air.

"In the first place, Mr. Penton, we are a duly authorized committee with power to wait upon you. This boy Rush is not a member of the committee. We represent the newly formed union. Will you kindly ask the boy to withdraw?"

The superintendent elevated his eyebrows in mild surprise.

"Is he not a member of the union?"

"Yes," admitted Cavard with evident reluctance.

"And you are here in the interests of the union?"

"Certainly, sir."

"Then I see no objection to his remaining. If you are here in the interest, as you say, or in behalf of the men of our own mines, any one of the other men is free to be present and to hear all that takes place between us. Rush, sit down, if you wish."

Steve, without showing either triumph or satisfaction in his face, quietly seated himself against the wall. Cavard's face was dark, but he made no reply to the superintendent's word in the matter.

"As I already have said, we represent the new union," continued the Russian. "At a meeting last night certain grievances that have long existed in the mine—that is, you understand, it is the union speaking, not myself personally?"

"Oh, certainly. Go on," smiled the superintendent.

"Certain grievances were taken up and discussed. The result of that discussion was the

drawing up of certain demands, which the miners believe you will not hesitate to grant. It had been understood that these concessions already had been under consideration by the mine officials."

"I am not aware that any particular concessions to the miners have been contemplated. What are your demands?"

"The demands of the union are for an eight-hour day and an increase in the scale of wages. Neither demand is at all unreasonable——"

"Let me see your papers," interrupted Mr. Penton.

The walking delegate and president handed the paper containing the miners' demands to the superintendent. Mr. Penton read the document through quickly, then went over it again.

"These are very radical demands, Mr. Cavard," he said, glancing up at the walking delegate.

"We think not, sir."

"And in the event of these demands being refused, may I ask what it is the purpose of the members of the union to do?"

"That is a matter for future consideration. I have no doubt, however, that a satisfactory arrangement can be made between us."

"What mines are included in the union?"

"All of the mines belonging to this company,

both surface and underground, together with the independent mines on the range. The other and independent mines have been represented by delegates at the meetings thus far."

"You say this was decided upon at the meeting last night?"

"Yes, sir."

"And it was a wholly representative meeting?"

"It was, sir. The delegates from the various shafts were on hand, though many were unable to attend."

"May I say something, sir?" asked Steve.

"Certainly. What is it, Rush?"

"I merely wish to present for your consideration the fact that I believe the meeting at which these demands were drawn up was not a representative one. Many of us did not receive our notifications until this morning."

"That was your own fault," interjected Cavard.

"I beg to differ with you. The notifications advising us that the meeting was to be held last night were not mailed until midnight last night, after the meeting had taken place, Mr. Cavard, and you know that is the truth. It was a 'fixed' meeting and I am willing to go before a representative gathering of the union and prove that fact."

"I object!" shouted the Duke. "I did not come here to be insulted by a young loafer like you."

Mr. Penton hammered on the table with his fist.

"Gentlemen, that will do. Mr. Rush is not a loafer. I consider him a young gentleman and an honest man. If his point is correct, I have but one thing to say."

Cavard's face worked nervously. He was making a violent effort to control himself. Mr. Penton was eyeing the man keenly.

"If you can show me that these demands have been approved by a full and representative gathering of the men in our employ, then I will not only take your grievances into consideration, but will transmit them to the officers of the company for their decision. You no doubt know that it is not within my power to grant such sweeping demands as these. Unless it is the expression of a majority of the men, I decline to give the matter any attention whatever."

"Are you going to take the word of an irresponsible boy against that of a man of experience and recognized standing among the men in your employ?" almost shouted Cavard, who was rapidly losing his self-control.

"I am of the opinion that Rush's standing is equally as high as your own. You thought

enough of him to make him the secretary of your organization. As such, he surely should be entitled to attention and——"

"He is not the secretary of the union. The men fired him out last night. He was——"

Cavard checked himself suddenly. His face flushed. He had said something that he had not intended to say at all, but his temper had gotten the better of him, leading him into an unwitting admission.

Steve Rush grinned sarcastically.

"Is this true, Rush?" demanded the superintendent, turning toward Steve.

"I am told that it is," replied the boy politely. "I have not yet learned why, but I have a fairly good idea."

"And what do you propose to do about it, my lad?"

"I am going to see to it that the men understand the trick that has been played on them. I am going to let the majority of them know how they were fooled as to the meeting. I think they will be rather surprised. But I beg your pardon; I have said too much."

"I should say you had," muttered Cavard.

"The interview is closed, gentlemen," announced Mr. Penton. "You have my ultimatum in the matter. When you can come to me properly authorized, I will give your demands con-

sideration, and not until then. I have nothing to do with your differences in your organization. I do know, however, that Mr. Rush is a young man whose word I would take as far as that of any man I know. Good evening, gentlemen."

The superintendent rose, indicating that the interview need not be prolonged.

Very much crestfallen, the delegates turned toward the door, followed by Steve.

"You will hear from us again, Mr. Penton," announced Cavard, speaking with emotion.

"Very good, sir."

"You young whelp, you'll suffer for this evening's work," raged the walking delegate when the callers had regained the street. "I'll see to it that your path isn't one of roses hereafter. I give you fair warning. I am the master here, and you will find that out to your sorrow."

"It has been my experience," answered Steve, "that men who make the loudest threats are the least to be feared. Let me tell you, while I have the opportunity, that the best thing you can do is to carry on the affairs of the union honestly. Otherwise you will go down, and the union will go down with you."

Steve turned away. Once more he had defeated the walking delegate and president of the union by a masterful move.

CHAPTER XV

A WARNING NOT HEEDED

THE word that was spread by Cavard and his associates during the next few days acted as a torch to the minds of the miners. That the superintendent had almost turned them out of his office was the information that reached the miners from various sources.

In the meantime the organization was being perfected, not from any regular meetings that were being held, for Cavard did not propose to move again until he was fully prepared. At the same time Steve Rush began to realize that the men were looking upon him with disapproving eyes. He had been a traitor to their cause, according to the information that had been subtly instilled into the miners' minds. At first he did not understand what this new attitude meant, but gradually the truth began to dawn upon him.

Rush held many conversations with the men who, in the past, had been friendly to him. He saw, however, that their minds had been poisoned against him, and he well knew the source from which the poison had come.

Bob Jarvis had shared in the dislike that was

growing for Steve Rush, but Bob did not care particularly. He was a self-reliant boy, well used to looking out for himself and battling his way through the world. Steve, on the other hand, felt that there was a greater principle involved—the welfare of the men themselves, who, he believed, were being misled. And still, beyond this, was the duty of the Iron Boys to their employers. Steve had not seen Mr. Penton since the meeting in the latter's office.

Before the end of the week notices were sent out for a meeting of the union. This time every man in the organization received a notice, this reaching all the miners of the Red Rock, Cousin Jack and the independent mines.

There was an activity on the part of all hands, never before observable on the iron range. Cavard, in the short time that the union had been organized, had formed such a combination that his power and influence were far-reaching. His lieutenants were working everywhere. The plot he had formed was now ready to be put into effect.

A definite refusal to accede to the demands of the miners had been received from the main offices of the company, no matter whether the demands were endorsed by every man on the range or not. The company announced that it proposed to run its own business.

While Mr. Penton did not wholly approve of the attitude of the company, believing in more pacific measures, he had no alternative in the matter. Cavard had been notified of the decision of the officials, and had been told that no further conferences could be had, at least for the present.

When Steve heard this he shook his head doubtfully.

"That means trouble, Bob," he said.

"It strikes me that there has been nothing but trouble for a long time," answered Jarvis. "What do you think the men will do?"

"I don't know."

"Are you going to the meeting to-night?"

"Yes. We shall both go. I have an idea that it will be a lively meeting. We may not be welcome, but we shall be there, just the same."

That night, as Steve was hurrying to his boarding place, he met Cavard's sister Marie, who kept house now for the walking delegate. She was a pretty young woman, and though Steve never had known her well, she had taken a great liking to the young miner, having urged him, on various occasions, to call and see them. Rush never had done so because he did not like her brother.

Miss Cavard stopped squarely in front of Steve, barring his way.

"Good evening, Mr. Rush," she greeted, extending a friendly hand. "You were in such a great hurry that I thought you were going to run over me."

"I beg your pardon, I didn't see you," answered the lad apologetically. "I am in something of a hurry to get home and dress for the meeting to-night, after I have had my supper."

"Just like your name, sir; always in a rush. You haven't even time to come and see us. I am beginning to think you do not care to have us for your friends."

Steve did not answer.

"Tell me frankly why you have always refused my invitations to visit us."

"Frankly, Miss Cavard, your brother and myself are not very friendly."

"Is that the reason? He thinks that you have not been loyal to the union."

The Iron Boy drew himself up proudly.

"We will not discuss that subject, Miss Cavard."

"Come, I will walk along with you, since you are in such a great hurry. Because you and my brother are not friendly is no reason why you and I should not be friends, is it?"

"Perhaps not, but it is better that we should not be friends under the circumstances."

Miss Cavard laughed softly.

"You are a very out-spoken boy, I must say. You tell me you are going to the meeting to-night?"

"Yes; of course."

They had been walking along side by side. Miss Cavard halted suddenly.

"Why should you go?"

"I am a member of the union and I must do my duty whether I accomplish anything or not."

"*Don't* go!" she said almost sharply.

"Don't go?" repeated Steve slowly. "Why not, pray?"

"My dear boy, I am some years older than you. I have had more experience with the world, and perhaps I am better able to understand some things than you are. You are young and impulsive, and——"

"But why do you advise me not to go to the meeting?" persisted the lad.

"I cannot answer that question. I was in hopes you would not ask. You must not press me for an explanation, for I cannot give it. But please stay away from that meeting to-night. You can do no good. Everything is settled. The temper of the men has been aroused, and I fear there will be trouble."

"Trouble for whom?" demanded Steve, bending suspicious eyes upon her.

"Ah, that I cannot say. Ask me no questions,

for I shall not answer them. Don't you see what a risk I am running in saying as much as I have said?"

"I beg your pardon, Miss Cavard; it was very thoughtless of me. I——"

"And you will remain away?" she asked eagerly.

"I cannot."

"Why not?"

"I already have answered that question. It is my duty to be there, and no one shall ever say that Steve Rush shirked his duty as he saw it. I am not afraid of anything the men may do there. No one will harm me. I——"

"Do not be too sure of that," interjected the girl quickly.

"I thank you, but I must go. I am not afraid."

"I am sorry." She laid a hand on the Iron Boy's arm. "I am sorry you will not be warned by me, for trouble surely will follow. You will treat what I have told you as an absolute confidence?"

"That goes without saying, Miss Cavard. I thank you very much. I cannot tell you how grateful I am for your kindness. I should not have expected it from Mr. Cavard's sister."

"Mr. Cavard's sister is not——" The girl checked herself sharply. "Good night, Mr.

Rush. If you will not accept my warning, be careful," was the young woman's parting injunction.

Steve pondered over the interview while eating his supper. Then while he was dressing for the meeting, Bob demanded to know what was on his mind.

"Have you heard anything about expected trouble at the meeting to-night, Bob?"

"Nothing except what you said. You told me there was going to be trouble, didn't you?"

"I guess I did, at that. Well, perhaps I wasn't so far wrong. I want you to stick pretty close to me to-night, for I have had a warning that something is in the wind."

Bob gazed at his companion keenly.

"What have you heard?"

"Nothing more than I have just told you."

"Who gave you the tip?"

"I am not at liberty to say. Perhaps it is a false alarm, but it is just as well to be prepared. The miners are very much excited. Have you heard anything else of interest to-day?"

"No; nothing but what you have heard. The men are all down on the bosses, and are making all sorts of threats."

"Yes, I know that," nodded Rush. "It's too bad. If anything serious comes of this it will be due to one man."

"The Duke?"

"You have guessed it. Little does he care for the welfare of the men. He is working for Cavard, and for no one else. The man craves notoriety and power, and he is having more than his share of both just now. Did you ever meet his sister?"

"Once. She seems to be a mighty fine woman."

"So she impressed me."

"Why did you ask about the sister?" demanded Jarvis, his eyes narrowing as he squinted suspiciously at his companion.

"You ask too many questions. Hurry up, or we shall be late. It is nearly eight o'clock now, and the meeting is called for eight."

"Which means nine. None of them ever gets there on time, except the fellows who don't spruce up as much as we do."

A few minutes later the Iron Boys were on their way to the meeting place. Before they reached the hall—the meeting this time taking place in the town hall, which was much larger than the place where they had first met—the lads found themselves in a great crowd. Voices were pitched high, and loud conversations were being carried on in many languages.

"This is something like what I imagine the Tower of Babel must have been," laughed Rush.

"What a mob! Poor, misled fellows! They believe they have been greatly wronged. If they only knew how well they are treated there would be few to attend a meeting of this sort."

No one appeared to pay any attention to the Iron Boys as they made their way through the crowd and up the stairs into the big room, where a couple of hundred men had already assembled.

Everyone in the room was talking and gesticulating excitedly. The boys were thankful that they had been able to gain their seats without attracting any marked attention.

Cavard had already taken his place on the platform, where, with his new secretary, he was going over some papers spread out on a table before them.

Inside of twenty minutes after the arrival of the Iron Boys the hall was packed, every seat being taken, while rows of men four or five deep lined the sides of the room and the aisles.

Cavard rose, swept the assemblage with a half-triumphant glance, then rapped for order.

"The meeting will please come to order," he said quietly, standing motionless for a moment after perfect stillness had settled over the big room. The effect of his attitude was not lost on the miners. They were already deeply impressed with the importance of the occasion.

"The secretary will please read the minutes

of the last meeting,'' directed the chairman, resuming his seat.

Mike Caldert, the new secretary, rose awkwardly to his feet, and, in a halting voice, read the minutes that, it was evident to many, had not been penned by him. He stumbled over the unfamiliar words, mispronouncing, running sentences together, completely ignoring all punctuation marks.

Rush and Jarvis were deeply interested in the reading of these minutes, especially the part that dealt with the deposing of Rush from office and putting another man in his place. This part the chairman read after having taken the book from the hands of the secretary in order to give the reading more emphasis.

During the reading Steve's face was pale but calm, while Bob sat opening and closing his fingers nervously.

''Now look out for happenings,'' whispered Steve, smiling grimly.

CHAPTER XVI

THE VENGEANCE OF THE MOB

"IT'S an outrage!" exclaimed Jarvis in a loud tone, causing those about him to look sharply in his direction.

Steve gripped his companion's arm.

"Be quiet," he whispered.

Bob subsided, but it was with difficulty that he restrained himself from giving vent to his wrath. Both lads remained silent until the reading of the minutes had been completed.

"If there are no objections to the minutes of the last meeting, as just read, they will stand approved," announced the chairman. "There being no objection, they are ap——"

Steve Rush rose slowly to his feet in an impressive stillness. Every eye in the room was turned in his direction.

"I object to the adoption of the minutes as read," said the Iron Boy in a steady voice which, while not loud, carried to every part of the room.

Cavard's face darkened.

"On what ground?" he demanded sharply.

"On the ground that the last meeting was illegal—that it was no meeting at all. The last meeting was a secret meeting, attended only by

those whom certain persons in this organization wished to have present——"

"You are wrong!" said the chairman. "The meeting was perfectly regular, as you and every other man here well knows. You are insinuating that the members of this union have acted dishonestly. You are casting a slur on every man here."

"Sit down!" yelled a chorus of voices.

"Shut up, or get out!"

"Men, I haven't finished yet. I——"

"Yes, you have! *Sit down!*"

Some one jerked the lad back into his seat, but whether it was a hostile or a friendly act Rush was unable to determine. He could not even tell who had done it.

"The minutes stand approved," announced the presiding officer, smiting the table a resounding whack with his gavel. "What is the further pleasure of the meeting?"

There was no reply at once. Finally a man in the rear of the hall spoke.

"What about the company's treatment of our demands for more wages and less work?" he asked.

"That is the matter that we have come here to discuss," said Cavard. "In view of the fact that I acted as the chairman of the committee that called upon Mr. Penton it will be proper

for me to speak on the subject before this meeting. We presented our petition, which the superintendent agreed to consider after it had been endorsed by a full meeting of the union. Instead of giving it proper consideration, however, we have received notice that our committee will not be welcome; that the company will run its own business. In other words, the company has broken faith with us. The remedy lies with you. I am your servant. But let me ask you, are you going to submit to the tyranny of the bosses? Are you going to let them trample you under their feet?"

"No, no!" roared the miners.

"Then assert your manhood! Show them that you are men; that you are determined to fight for your liberty and your homes."

In his subtle, unscrupulous manner, Cavard was working up his hearers to a high pitch of excitement.

"This is anarchy!" cried Steve, but his voice was lost in the uproar.

"Your brothers in the independent mines are in the same situation. They are ready to join with you in any action you see fit to take. Their delegates are here with us to-night to tell you so," continued Cavard glibly.

"Yes!" cried a man in the centre of the hall whom Rush remembered to have seen in com-

pany with the walking delegate on various occasions. "We are among the downtrodden. We are ready to fight, shoulder to shoulder, with you, for our rights."

"It's a put-up job," whispered Jarvis in his companion's ear.

Steve nodded. "It is a crime," he added. "Those poor, ignorant fellows are being led as if they were dogs at the end of a leash."

"Where are our friends?"

"I am afraid there are not many of them left—not enough to do any good. I see few of them here to-night. Perhaps they understood what was going to happen even better than we did, and decided to remain away."

"It is for you to act," urged the chairman insistently. "Now is your time to assert yourselves."

"I move that we send an ultimatum to the bosses, saying that unless they meet our demands by the sixth of the month we will strike."

"They won't agree to your demands, men," urged the chairman. "They have already told you that. Any delay is so much more money in the pockets of the bosses. I do not wish to influence you; I merely want to point out the facts to you."

"Then we'll strike here and now!" yelled a miner, springing to his feet.

Steve recognized in him another of the walking delegate's lieutenants.

"Yes! Strike, strike, strike!" howled a hundred voices. Men leaped to their feet, yelling madly, beside themselves with excitement.

The walking delegate, by skilful manipulation, had stirred the men to a dangerous pitch. They were ready to do and dare anything. The mob spirit had taken possession of them. A few moments more and they would be past all control. Cavard saw this. Such a situation he did not desire. His must be the master hand.

The chairman pounded on the table with his gavel until it broke, the head shooting over among the excited miners.

Little by little quiet was restored.

"You are accomplishing nothing. Did I hear someone make a motion a short time ago?" asked the presiding officer suggestively.

The miner who had called for a strike rose to his feet.

"Mr. Chairman," he began, "I make a motion that this union declare itself opposed to the rule of the bosses, and that we call a strike, beginning at midnight to-night, in all the mines on the range, both those belonging to the company and the independent owners, as well."

"Hear, hear!" yelled the audience.

A gleam of satisfaction lighted up the face

of the chairman for the moment, after which the expression in his eyes grew steely.

"Second the motion," shouted a chorus of voices.

"You have heard the motion, gentlemen. It has been moved and seconded that the Amalgamated Mine Workers call a strike in all of the mines, beginning at midnight to-night. Are you ready for the question?"

"Question, question, question!"

"Stop!"

Steve Rush sprang to his feet. He waved his hat to attract the attention of the miners.

"Stop, men! You are about to make a great mistake. Do you know what a strike means? It means that your families will suffer; it means starvation for your wives and children. You have been led into this by soft words and false promises. That man," pointing to the chairman, "is using you to serve his own selfish purpurposes. The Duke isn't your friend. He is your worst enemy, and I will prove it to you before I have done with him."

"Throw the boy out!"

"Order! You are out of order!" shouted Cavard. "I shall have you ejected from the hall unless you cease this tirade. Men, there is a motion before the house and the question has been put."

"I insist upon being heard," shouted Steve Rush. "I accuse that man of base trickery. I demand that you give me a chance to say what I have to say. Then I will leave the hall if you wish, but I'm going to speak."

"Put that man out! He is a traitor to the union!" thundered the presiding officer. "He is the mouthpiece of the bosses."

A wave of hissing swept over the room, as if all the serpents of the jungle had suddenly been let loose.

"He is the tool of the bosses! What shall we do with him?" yelled a man, leaping to the bench on which he had been sitting.

"Throw him out!"

"There's two of them," yelled another.

"Throw them both out! They're traitors!"

"Traitors, traitors!" thundered the mob.

"All in favor of the motion to strike say 'aye,'" roared the chairman.

"Aye!" was the response from hundreds of throats.

"Carried. We strike at midnight," announced the chairman.

The diversion of voting on the motion had, for the moment, drawn the attention of the men from the Iron Boys. Steve was still standing. His face was flushed and he was gazing at the excited faces about him intently.

"Traitor, traitor!" screamed the mob once more, turning their attention to the slim young fellow who was facing them so calmly.

"There is the traitor!" cried Rush, pointing to the triumphant Cavard. "That is the man who has brought this about, and all for his own gain. He is as crooked as the tram road on the sixteenth level in the Red Rock Mine."

With a yell, the mob surged toward the spot where Steve was standing. Bob Jarvis slowly rose to his feet.

"We're in for it, Steve," he said.

"It looks that way. Stand fast!"

"You bet I will. I am just spoiling to crack a few of those wooden heads."

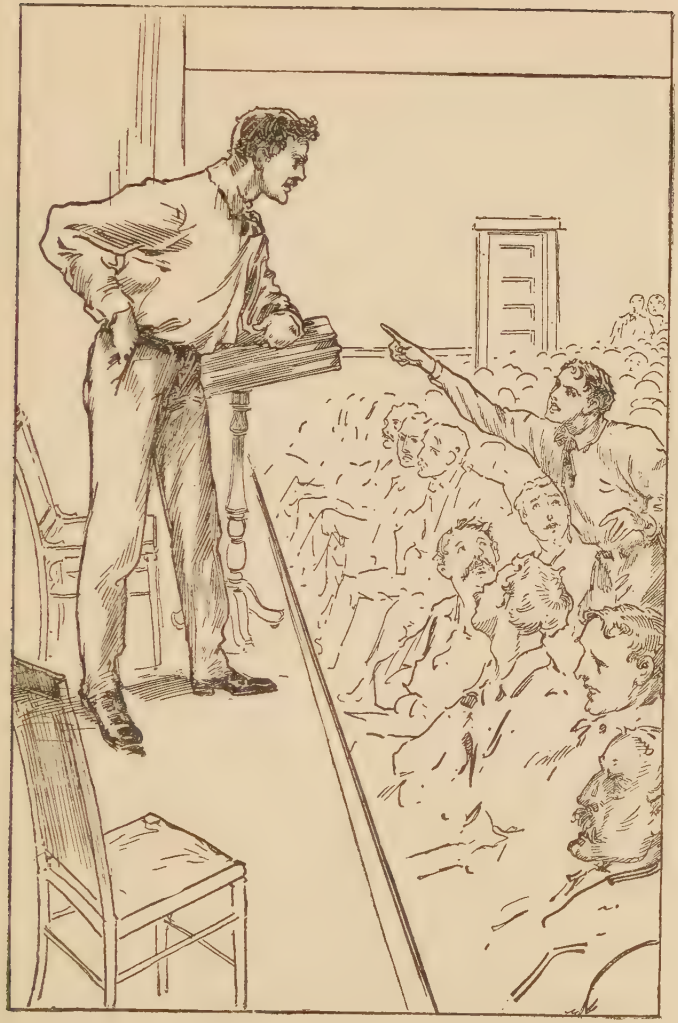
"Back up toward the wall. There is an opening there now," directed Rush, stepping out into the aisle and moving a few paces away from the place where they had been sitting.

"Men, you're making a mistake!" called Steve. "I am your friend, and one of these days you'll learn that I am. I have been your friend all the way through, but that man has poisoned your minds against me."

"Throw him out!"

"*Kill* the traitor!"

The words were repeated in several different language. Huns, Finns, Italians and others made a wild rush. There were those in the audi-



"There is the Traitor!" Cried Rush.

ence who were on the side of the Iron Boys; there were those who would have taken their part had they had the courage to do so. The rage of the mob frightened the timid friends and they quickly made their way from the hall that they, too, might not fall victims to the anger of the miners.

Steve saw some of his supposed friends sneaking away and his lips curled scornfully.

A Finn made a vicious pass at Rush's head.

Steve planted a powerful blow between the fellow's eyes, the man toppling over backwards into the arms of his companions. Ere the victim had been pushed out of the way two other men had shared the same fate.

"Look behind you, Bob," cried the Iron Boy, as he began striking right and left.

Bob turned just in time to avoid a blow that had been aimed at his head. He ducked and saved himself. As he came up he planted a blow on his assailant's jaw, sending the man to the floor and rendering him unconscious.

"Come on, you miserable cowards!" bellowed Jarvis. "We can't thrash all of the people all of the time, but we can thrash some of the people some of the time."

At this moment Steve had grabbed a fallen miner by the heels. The man was slight. Steve picked the fellow up and hurled him right into

the face of the mob that was pressing in on him. Several men went down, but they were up again in a twinkling and charging the slender lads with redoubled fury.

During the tumult Cavard had made no effort to restore order. He stood calmly on the platform at the end of the hall, a grim smile of satisfaction on his face. He had known full well that this was coming, for he had skilfully brought it about. Little did he care if the Iron Boys were killed. There could be no responsibility on his part. He fervently hoped that they would at least be so thoroughly beaten that they would trouble him no further.

Thus far the lads had held their own. They were cool and collected, while those opposing them had lost all control of themselves. This gave the boys a slight advantage, but the lads knew they could not expect to hold out very long against those hundreds of angry men, who were fighting each other in their mad efforts to get at the "traitors," as they called the Iron Boys.

Steve was fighting with as much coolness as if he were in a friendly boxing match, except that his blows were delivered with considerably more force. Bob was proving himself a whirlwind, charging this way and that, using both feet and fists, all to equally good advantage. Many a shin felt the sting of his heavy boot and

many a face bore the marks of his heavy fists for days afterward.

"Come down here, you coward, and I'll give you a dose of the same medicine!" yelled Jarvis, chancing to catch the eye of the presiding officer in a brief lull in the fighting. "It's coming to you, and you're going to get it some time, even if you don't to-night."

Suddenly Steve slipped and fell to the floor. Bob sprang to his assistance, jerking his companion to his feet. But the move was fatal.

A kick from a heavy boot laid Bob Jarvis unconscious on the floor.

With a yell Steve Rush hit the man who had delivered the kick, knocking him clear over two benches that had not yet been smashed in the scrimmage. In doing so Rush had turned his back on the most persistent of his enemies. They were not slow to take advantage of the opportunity thus offered, and leaped upon him.

Steve went down under the weight that had been suddenly put upon him, fighting, struggling, wriggling desperately to free himself. But the odds were too great, and besides he was exhausted by his exertions. He realized that the fight was ended so far as he was concerned.

"Kill the traitors!"

"No—throw them out! Beat them up!"

"Yes, throw them out! That will settle them.

It isn't our fault if they fall out of the window," yelled Cavard.

"Out with them both!"

Someone jerked Rush to his feet, and as he did so, another planted a blow on the boy's jaw. Steve's head drooped to one side and his face turned suddenly pale. He would give them no further trouble, for he had been rendered unconscious by the cowardly blow.

"The window!" yelled a voice.

"Yes, out with him!"

Cavard's suggestion of a moment before had taken root. Instantly the miners began dragging the unconscious Steve toward the nearest window. It was closed, but that made no difference.

"Now, he-o-hee!"

There followed the sound of crashing glass and breaking woodwork as the form the Iron Boy went hurtling through the window, taking the sash with him in his flight.

"Now the other!"

Two men grabbed Jarvis, one at his feet, the other at his head. Bob followed in the wake of his companion, turning a complete somersault as he shot through the window. Bob had the advantage of Steve in that he had no window to break through. His was a clean flight, but his fall was none the less a serious one.

The drop that the boys had taken was all of twenty feet. What was below not one of the strikers cared.

Cavard pounded on the table for order.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen," he cried. "You are forgetting yourselves! Now that you have removed the disturbing elements, you will please come to order and we will proceed to finish the business of our meeting. You should not have handled them so roughly, though I am forced to admit that your anger was justified. What is the further pleasure of the meeting?"

"I move we notify the mines and tell the night shifts to knock off," suggested a man with a cooler head, who had taken no part in the uprising.

Slowly the men resumed their places, and the meeting settled down to business again.

CHAPTER XVII

FACING THEIR ASSAILANTS

JARVIS was the first to recover himself. He found himself lying half on the body of his companion.

"Steve, Steve!" he cried. "Are you much hurt."

Rush did not answer.

Bob, as soon as he could pull himself together sufficiently to do so, began shaking his companion.

"Wake up, wake up!"

"Huh?" muttered Steve, twisting and trying to raise himself.

"Thank goodness, they didn't kill you," exclaimed Jarvis, hugging his companion delightedly. "Where are you hurt?"

"I—I thought the house fell on me. What was it?"

"Nothing much. I just landed on you from a second story window—that's all. It's a wonder I didn't break every bone in your body."

A pile of rubbish had been thrown out that afternoon, in cleaning up the hall for the evening meeting. There were papers, excelsior, burlap and other soft substances in the heap. It

was on this heap that the Iron Boys had fallen in their plunge from the second story, and to that heap of rubbish they no doubt owed their lives. As it was, however, they were badly bruised and shaken.

"They must have thrown us out," said Rush, sitting up and rubbing the bruised spots on his body. "The hounds! But no, I shouldn't blame them so much. Cavard is the man who incited them to violence. Bob, I believe he planned, before the meeting, to do that very thing. I was warned not to come here to-night, and the person who warned me was in a position to know what plans Cavard had in mind."

"Who warned you?"

"You asked that once before, and I told you I could not tell you. I wouldn't under any circumstances give the name of the person who warned me."

"Let me help you up."

Steve was painfully getting to his feet.

"No; I am able to take care of myself."

"Came pretty near having a fight, didn't we?" grinned Jarvis.

"Almost," admitted Rush. "The ones I most wanted to hit weren't in that mix-up. That is my greatest regret. Another is that we had to damage some of the men who were once our friends."

"Served them right! They don't deserve sympathy," growled Jarvis. "We didn't give it to them hard enough. I guess some of them won't forget the walloping they got for many days to come."

"How about ourselves?" questioned Rush, laughing mirthlessly. "It occurs to me that you and I are pretty well banged up. I can't see how you look, but I think I must resemble the last rose of summer, with all the petals blown off. My, but my head aches!"

"Never mind," soothed Bob. "You are not the only one. There are others, and there are other headaches just as bad as yours. What shall we do now?"

"Is the meeting still going on?"

"Yes; I hear them up there. They are finishing up the business that we interrupted, I reckon."

"I'm going up there," announced Rush with decision.

"I wouldn't, if I were in your place. You are in no sort of shape to get into any more trouble to-night," advised Jarvis.

"I do not intend to get into trouble, Bob. But I am going back for a moment, just the same."

"Then I'll go with you."

"Very well; but don't stir up any more trouble. We have had enough, and I am not

sure that we are entirely blameless, but I could not sit there and see that man leading the men into trouble, urging them on to their own destruction, as it were."

"You might as well have kept still, for all the good it did."

"Yes, I guess that's so. You and I seem fated to get into trouble. Somehow we can't keep out of it."

"Unless we are thrown out," suggested Jarvis, at which both boys laughed as heartily as was possible with their aching bodies. The laugh did more to restore them to a better frame of mind than anything else could have done at that moment.

"Come on, then; we will go up as far as the door."

"What are you going to do?"

"I just want to say something, that's all; then we will go home, where we might better have stayed in the beginning."

The Iron Boys approached the front of the building and started to enter. They found their way barred by a guard at the foot of the stairs.

"You can't go in here," warned the man.

"Who says we can't?" demanded Bob.

"*I* say so."

"Well, you don't count. We're going in, just the same, and if you get funny I'll throw you

out into the street. If you follow us up and raise a disturbance I'll kick you down stairs. I feel just like kicking somebody real hard," growled Jarvis savagely, thrusting a belligerent chin close to the other man's face. "Go on, Steve; he won't bite."

"No, I hardly think he will," smiled Rush, as he started up the stairs, followed by his companion, the latter turning every few moments to see if the guard were following them. The fellow had prudently remained at the foot of the stairs. Perhaps he had seen something of the hitting powers of the Iron Boys.

Steve Rush stepped into the meeting room and came to a halt about even with the chairman's platform.

Every eye in the room was instantly focused on the lad. He did not present a prepossessing appearance. His clothes were torn and covered with dirt, his face was streaked with blood where it had been cut when he crashed through the window in his flight from the hall, while his hands were in a similar condition.

Cavard discovered him about this time.

"Young man, haven't you caused enough trouble for one night, without coming back looking for more?" demanded the chairman.

"I have not returned to look for trouble. I have come for one thing, to warn you."

"Against what?"

"Against trouble. I presume you have voted for a strike?"

"The members of the union have done so."

"Then let me tell you that that action, which you brought about by underhand scheming, marks the beginning of your downfall, Mr. Cavard. I believe you to be a scheming scoundrel, and I shall make it my business to expose you to the men who are following you so blindly now. Look out, Mr. Walking Delegate and President. It's a pretty long level that doesn't bring up against a hard rock heading sooner or later. I wish my name taken from the roll of the union. I do not wish to belong to any organization that you are connected with. That is all I have to say to you."

"Out with you, before I order you thrown downstairs!" shouted the head of the union. "You can't resign, because you've been bounced. The men fired you out of the window; then they fired you from the union, you and your handy-fisted friend there."

"Thank you. Good night. When you men and your families are suffering from hunger and cold, perhaps you may remember the warning I have given you."

Steve turned on his heel and limped down the stairs, with Bob as a rear guard.

"Hey, Steve!" called Jarvis, halting at the door.

"What is it?" demanded Rush, halting outside the door.

"Shall I hand this guard one for luck? Shall I punch him, just once, good and hard?"

"Certainly not. He hasn't done anything to you. We have had enough fighting for one night. Besides, I am lame and sore, and I want to get home. Come along."

Jarvis followed, but reluctantly. He could hardly restrain himself from thrashing the grinning guard at the foot of the stairs.

When the Iron Boys removed their clothes and took their bath they realized, for the first time, how roughly they had been handled. Their bodies were covered with bruises, but their faces were unmarked, save where Steve had been cut by the glass when he was hurled through the window. There were many other men, however, whose faces had not fared so well, and they would bear the marks of the Iron Boys' fists for days to come.

The boys were in bed soon after. On the morrow they were to awaken to new experiences. Ahead of them was a great strike, in which the Iron Boys were to play a tremendously important part, and during which they were to win new laurels.

CHAPTER XVIII

PROMOTED BY THE PRESIDENT

AT midnight every mine on the range shut down.

Ten thousand men were out for the time being. Not all of these were in sympathy with the strike, of course. Many were loyal to their employers, and would have continued at their work, but the superintendents of the various shafts gave orders to shut down the mines until the following day, when other plans would be made.

At daylight on the following morning the private car of the president of the mining company entered the town. Mr. Carrhart and Mr. Penton were in consultation in the latter's office half an hour later. The president had been through strikes before. He knew what they meant, and his face wore a serious expression.

"I don't care so much on our own account, Penton. We have a million tons of ore on the dumps at the mines now, enough to keep us going until navigation on the lakes shuts down. I feel sorry for the men, and for their innocent families. Who is this man Cavard?"

"I always have considered him a bright, capable man. He is an inspector, as you know. I never saw anything wrong about him until this matter came up. But I believe he has been organizing the men for some time. Rush accused the fellow, in my presence, of carrying this thing through from dishonest motives."

"Ah, Rush! What about these boys? Then they are not in sympathy with the strikers?" questioned the president.

"No. They both joined the union, not, I believe, because of any sympathy that they felt for the movement, but in the light of after events, it is plain to me that Rush saw what was coming, and thought he might be able to stem the tide. It was too big a task for him. He did not fully appreciate the magnitude of the task that he had set for himself."

"They are splendid boys," continued Mr. Carrhart, the lines of his face softening perceptibly. "Splendid boys. Tell me about their part in this affair."

Mr. Penton did so. He related to the president the incidents connected with the Iron Boys joining the union. Of their having pitted themselves against the man Cavard, of Steve Rush's speeches and of the fight in the meeting on the previous night, when the boys had been handled so roughly.

"The cowards!" exclaimed Mr. Carrhart, thumping the superintendent's desk with a powerful fist. "They deserve no sympathy, and——"

"You mean the leaders deserve no sympathy?" corrected Mr. Penton.

"Yes. Do you know how the boys are this morning—whether they were seriously hurt or not?"

"They went home after the meeting—after they had reëntered the meeting room and withdrawn from the organization. I have not heard from them this morning, of course."

"Please send over to their boarding place and find out as soon as you think the people there are up. I should like to see the boys some time this morning if they are able to get out. If not, we will go to them," announced the president with emphasis. "How many of our men will stand by us?"

"I have no idea. Not very many."

"While there is no necessity for our turning a wheel for the rest of the season, we must do so for the moral effect it will have on the strikers. We must not give way for a moment. We already are paying our men better wages than almost any other mine in the country. It is not the principle of this corporation to grind its men down, but to pay them all they can earn.

Yet there is a limit beyond which we cannot go. Have you any suggestions to make, Penton?"

"Yes. I should notify the men that if they wish to declare the strike off and go to work within twenty-four hours, all will be taken back without prejudice and given work all winter. Otherwise the mines will be manned by others when we get ready to work them. I should get into communication with our mine captains and find out if our engineers, pump-men, electricians and other practical men are to be depended upon."

"It shall be done at once."

"And we must not forget about our young friends, Rush and Jarvis," continued Penton. "I fear we shall have violence before this strike is ended. The union has plenty of money for a long fight, but I do not believe a large amount of it will get to the men themselves, from what I know about their leaders."

"I should imagine not. I will go back to my car for breakfast and you can make your reports to me there. That, perhaps, will be best. Better have your notices gotten out at once."

"I will do so."

When the miners went out on the street that morning they found the town placarded with the notices, as directed by President Carrhart. Groups quickly gathered about these notices,

those who could read translating the notices to those of the foreigners whose knowledge of English was limited.

Soon these groups were engaged in excited discussions. The word went out that a meeting of the union would be called for nine o'clock. This meeting was of the briefest nature, lasting not more than twenty minutes. A stirring address by Cavard was the final argument necessary to clinch the matter. The strike was on, and the men were going to stand fast until the bosses should yield, which the walking delegate assured the men the former would soon do. That owners could not afford to hold out for more than a month at the longest was the promise made to the striking miners.

The meeting ended amid wild enthusiasm, after which the men strolled about the streets, well satisfied with themselves and thoroughly enjoying the liberty and freedom of their new situation.

No overtures were made to the mine owners by the leaders of the strike that day. Cavard proceeded exactly as if the mine officials did not exist. Word of what had been done at the morning meeting had been quickly carried to Mr. Carrhart. The president smiled grimly.

The latter had just finished his breakfast when Steve Rush and Bob Jarvis presented them-

selves at the private car and were quickly admitted. Mr. Carrhart greeted them warmly, bidding them be seated.

"I will talk with you while I look over my mail and telegrams. Rush, you look as if you had been pretty roughly handled."

Rush colored.

"I guess I must have been."

"But we gave them something to remember us by," retorted Jarvis. "There are some sore heads in that crowd to-day. I saw a few of them on our way here this morning."

"Rush, I want to thank you for your efforts in our behalf. It was a brave thing to do, in the face of the excitement of the men. The company will not forget what both of you have done. It is unnecessary for me to ask whether you two are going to stand by the company."

"No, sir; it should not be necessary for you to ask. There never was a moment when there was any doubt about it. Are you going to operate the mines just the same, if I may ask?"

"Yes," answered Mr. Carrhart, after brief reflection. "Of course we shall not be able to get out much ore, but we shall do the best we can to show the men that we are independent."

"When do you wish us to go to work?"

"Probably at one this afternoon, though this depends upon whether the superintendent is

able to operate the machinery. I hear you have doubts of the honesty of the man Cavard. What do you know about him?"

"Not very much, sir. I know that he did a very crooked thing in mailing most of his notifications for a meeting after the meeting had taken place. Evidently he had privately notified those whom he wished to be present."

"Hm-m-m! What was Cavard's motive?"

"I do not know, but I do know that I consider him a dangerous man. He has a remarkable influence over the men. He can lead them into anything he wishes. Is there no way that he could be arrested and checked?"

Mr. Carrhart laughed.

"That would be making a martyr of the man. No; we cannot have him arrested until he has done something that makes him liable to arrest. Even then it would not do unless the men could be convinced that he was working solely for his own selfish interests and against theirs."

"Then we'll prove it," announced Steve Rush with emphasis.

"Yes, we will!" agreed Jarvis.

Mr. Carrhart gazed at them quizzically.

"You boys almost make me believe that you will do what you say. I am half inclined to believe you will prove it, if you say so. Rush, I am going to give you Cavard's position. I

am going to make you a general inspector in the mines. It is a sort of roving commission, but it will give you authority to do pretty much what you like, of course acting under the instructions of the superintendent."

"What do you wish me to do especially?"

"Keep the mines going, or help to do so. See to it, so far as possible, that the company's property is protected. I do not apprehend any violence just yet, but it will come unless we are able to break the backbone of the strike before cold weather sets in. Do not be headstrong, but work with caution. You will be in danger before we have done this. I hope you will both be careful, for we can't afford to lose you boys just yet, and now we need the services of every loyal man in our employ. Report to Mr. Penton when you leave here, and he will give you your directions for the work of the day. You will act as inspector for both the Cousin Jack and the Red Rock Mines. And, Jarvis, I think I will have you act as assistant to the mining captain of the Red Rock. Curb your temper and keep your head level."

"Yes, sir; I'll try," answered Bob, smiling happily. He was delighted at his promotion.

The interview being ended, the boys bade the president good morning and hastened to the office of the superintendent. Angry looks were

directed at them as they passed along the street, but the Iron Boys gave no heed. They went on about their business as usual.

Mr. Penton was not in when they arrived. He came in soon after, and the lads told him what Mr. Carrhart had said.

"That's good," said Mr. Penton, rubbing his palms together. "I have arranged to have the machinery working at one o'clock to-day. All the engineers are loyal and I have assurance that quite a number of the men are willing to stand by us. We shall have quite a respectable force at work this afternoon."

"Then we will go over now and start in," said Steve.

The boys found fully a hundred men about the shafts of the two mines. When the strikers saw that the boys were going down into the mine they set up an angry shout. Jeers filled the air.

"Scab! Scab! Scab!" howled a hundred voices. But the Iron Boys held themselves steady, and, entering the cage, were shot down into the mine.

CHAPTER XIX

A COWARDLY BLOW

A TRAINLOAD of miners was brought into the town on the following morning. Not half a dozen of them got to the mines. Pickets halted the men at the station and "argued" to such good purpose that the newcomers joined the union then and there, save for a few who slipped through the ranks of the pickets and made their way to the mines.

This kept up for several days. As fast as the company sent new men into the mining region the strikers would "gobble" them up. The strike was being strengthened every day.

The face of Cavard, the walking delegate, wore a self-satisfied smile. All his well-laid schemes were working out according to programme. The only real opposition that he had had, that of the Iron Boys, had apparently wholly disappeared.

Steve and Bob were not idle, however. Aside from their daily work in the mines, they had set for themselves the difficult task of gathering sufficient evidence against Cavard to prove to the striking miners that their leader was merely using the strike for his own selfish purposes.

There was more or less work done in the mines, though no large quantity of ore was being mined. However, the company was making a very respectable showing, owing to the efforts of the Iron Boys, who accomplished the greater part of the executive work that was done. Mr. Penton's time was largely taken up on the surface, while the mine captains spent most of their hours at the mouths of the shafts, looking out for the safety of the shafts and the machinery.

The striking miners had held themselves well in check so far as the company's property was concerned. They made no attempt to damage it, but the loyal men had suffered. Of late the strikers had taken to beating the men as they came from work, whenever the strikers could lure a man out of the sight of others.

This caused some of the workers to quit. They had become frightened. Threats were being circulated that the workers would be even more roughly handled if they did not stop working and join the strikers.

Steve had not seen Miss Cavard since the evening when she had halted him and warned him against attending the meeting. He had thought over that warning several times since. It told him that the attack on himself and companion at the hall had been part of a prearranged plan.

Miss Cavard evidently had learned of it through her brother, and she had sought to dissuade Steve from attending the meeting.

"There must be some good in the girl, or she wouldn't have done that," Steve decided as he was passing the Cavard home one evening.

The strike had been on for about six weeks, and thus far the Iron Boys had avoided coming into conflict with the strikers, though the lads had been goaded almost to the point of desperation every time they showed themselves at the shaft, or where the strikers were congregated in the village. The strikers often sought to draw the boys into a fight, so that they might have a good excuse to beat the lads.

Rush and Jarvis were too shrewd to be caught in the trap. By this time they had become more and more a thorn in the side of Cavard. They were interfering with his plans. Their activity was too great to suit him, and the walking delegate planned to rid himself of his young foes in a way that would effectively dispose of them.

As Steve was passing the Cavard home on the evening in question, he glanced up and saw Miss Cavard standing on the front door step.

"Good evening, Mr. Rush," she greeted him. "Won't you come in?"

"No, thank you."

"I wish you would. I want to talk to you."

"You will excuse me, but I could not think of entering your brother's home, Miss Cavard."

"He is not at home. He is away much of the time now. I feel that I may trust you, Mr. Rush. I do not approve of my brother's actions, but he is my brother, just the same."

"I understand," murmured the boy.

"You remember an occasion, some time ago, when I begged you not to attend a certain meeting, do you not?"

"I do, indeed."

"You saw that my warning was not idle chatter?"

"I did."

"I like you, Mr. Rush. You are a fine young man, and I am going to warn you again."

"What, more trouble?" smiled Steve.

"There may be."

"What is it this time?"

"I cannot tell you, for I do not know. I do know that you have enemies who are plotting to do you harm. They will get you yet."

"I am not afraid of them," answered Steve, drawing himself up proudly.

"I know that. That is what worries me. What can you, a boy, do against a great crowd of men who are getting desperate? Oh, what terrible things these strikes are! How my heart aches for some of the wives and children of the

striking miners! They are actually suffering. I am doing what I can for the worst cases, and——"

"Can I help you, Miss Cavard? I should like to help someone who is suffering," said Rush quickly, evincing a sudden interest in what the girl was saying.

"Perhaps you might, but that is not what I wanted to speak with you about. I want to warn you again."

"Well, I am listening. What is the great danger that threatens me this time?"

"I told you I did not know. But you must leave town. You can take a vacation. I am sure your employers will be glad to give you one. Why not go home and visit your mother until this strike is ended?"

Rush gazed at the girl suspiciously. For the moment he harbored a suspicion that the girl herself was a part of the plot she said was being hatched against him. But he put the thought aside as unworthy.

"I couldn't do that, Miss Cavard. I should be a coward if I did, and no one shall accuse me of cowardice. I am going to stay here as long as the company has use for my services. If I am assaulted I shall do the best I can to defend myself. You may tell your brother that I do not fear him, if you choose."

"I shall do nothing of the sort," answered the girl sharply, flushing. "I wish I might say something that would change you, that would make you heed me."

"I appreciate your kindness; believe me, I do, Miss Cavard, but my duty is to my employers, and here I shall remain. If I get the worst of it, I shall know that I have done my duty——"

"There comes my brother. You must go."

Steve swung down the street at once. Half way down the block he met Cavard face to face.

The walking delegate stopped directly in front of the young man.

"Well, my friend, what do you think of the strike now?" demanded Cavard in a mocking tone.

"What do I think? I think it is the greatest outrage that was ever perpetrated on a body of men who have not the power to think for themselves. You will have much to answer for at the day of reckoning, Mr. Cavard."

"I'll pass all that, Rush. I have been talking with the men lately. They express themselves as being sorry for the way they used you. They want to make amends——"

"So I should judge from the way they act toward me when they meet me outside," interrupted Steve.

"That has all been a mistake. The men who have annoyed you are not the representative miners. They are the men who have been brought in here by the company. A pretty tough crowd——"

"I know who they are. You need not try to tell me."

"Our members have commissioned me to ask you to attend our meetings."

"What for? So they can give me another drubbing?" demanded the lad.

"No, no; you do not understand. They want to apologize. They want you to come back into the union. Believe me, it is the best thing you can do. Should you refuse I cannot answer for the consequences. The men are getting worked up to a high pitch. I do not know how long I shall be able to control them."

"You must think me a fool!" replied the Iron Boy. "Of course I shall not join the union. I have had enough unionism to last me for the rest of my life, if all unions are like this one. I do not believe they are, however."

"Take my advice and join."

"I took your advice once, and as a result I have some of the marks on my body still. I understand your purpose. You think I am a little too active, and you take this as the best way to rid yourself of the annoyance," added

the boy shrewdly. "No, thank you. My activity will continue until I have shown you to your blind followers in your true colors."

Steve started to pass Cavard, whereupon the latter quickly stepped in front of him, barring the Iron Boy's progress.

Steve's eyes snapped dangerously.

"Are you going to let me pass?"

"Not until I have finished what I have to say to you."

"Are you going to let me pass, or have I got to knock you down first? It must be one or the other."

For a moment the man and the boy stood looking into each other's eyes. Cavard towered half a head above the Iron Boy, and he was strong in proportion. There were few men in the mines possessing greater strength than the president of the union.

A sudden flush suffused the face of Cavard. Without an instant's warning he let go a powerful blow straight at the head of Steve Rush.

CHAPTER XX

LAMB CHOPS FOR THE BABY

QUICK as the blow had been, the Iron Boy had not been caught unawares. He had been watching the eyes of the walking delegate, and he had read the man's purpose some seconds before the blow was struck.

Steve swerved his head an inch to one side, permitting the blow to shoot over his shoulder.

The lad leaped lightly back in order to have more room in which to swing his body, then drove his fist straight out from the shoulder. The fist landed squarely on the point of the walking delegate's jaw.

Cavard had been caught off his guard. He had not looked for such a sudden return, and the failure of his own blow to land had thrown him off his poise.

The walking delegate turned half way about under the force of the blow, wavered for a brief instant, then measured his length on the wooden sidewalk, flat on his face.

"I'm sorry I did that," muttered Steve, with a revulsion of feeling. "But I had to, or I should have been roughly handled."

He turned Cavard over, looking into the man's pale face. Cavard was dazed, but Steve saw that he was not seriously hurt and would recover in a minute.

The boy's inclination was to hurry away. He conquered it. He was too much of a man to do a thing like that, so he stepped back a few paces, where he stood with folded arms waiting for his victim to recover.

This Cavard quickly did. He staggered to his feet unsteadily, still dazed and uncertain. All at once he fixed his eyes on the face of the Iron Boy.

"You—you whelp! You—you'll suffer for that cowardly blow. I'll—I'll hound you out of the camp, or else I'll——"

"Get run out yourself," finished Steve. "Good night."

With that the lad turned and walked briskly down the street. Cavard stood gazing after him for a moment, then started unsteadily for his own home. Could Steve Rush have seen the expression on the face of the walking delegate at that moment, he might possibly have thought better of his determination to remain in the mining town and fight his unequal battle.

The lad also had started for home, but he was destined to be still further delayed. His experiences for that night were not yet at an

end. A heavy hand was all at once laid on his shoulder with a grip so powerful that the boy winced.

He whirled about, expecting to find himself face to face with Cavard, and ready to do battle.

Instead, Rush found a giant form towering over him, peering down into his face.

"Hello, Olsen; is that you?"

The man nodded.

Segunder Olsen was an Icelander, a veritable giant in stature, and known to be a man possessing great strength. He had been forced out with his fellows when the strike was called. Steve had never passed half a dozen words with the Icelander. The latter was a taciturn man, but one who could do a day's work that was the wonder of the men who worked with him.

"What do you want, Olsen?" demanded Steve, trying to release himself from the other's grip.

"You make this strike, huh?"

"What—why certainly not. What made you think I did?"

"Men say you tell bosses not to pay us money. Then we must strike and get more. Huh?"

"They have told you lies, Olsen. I tried to prevent the strike. I knew how much you would all suffer if there were a strike, but the men

would not listen to me. You may go to work if you wish to. There is nothing to hinder your doing so."

"Not have me."

"Oh, yes, they will."

"You come with me, huh?"

"Where to?"

"Come; I show you what strike does. You come home with me, you see what strike does."

Without waiting for the boy to assent, Olsen, with his grip still on Steve's shoulder, started, fairly dragging the Iron Boy along with him.

Rush no longer offered any resistance. Something about the Icelander impressed the boy strongly. There was a note of hopelessness in the man's tone, though his face was impassive, which told Steve that the fellow was suffering great mental anguish.

"You need not hang to my shoulder, Olsen. I will go with you if you want me to," said the boy in a kindly tone.

But Segunder gave no heed. He held tightly to Steve's shoulder. The two hurried on, the Icelander taking long strides. He led the way to the outskirts of the village, coming to a halt before a dilapidated, one-storied cottage, the door of which Olsen pushed open, thrusting Steve Rush in. Olsen followed, closing the door.

A solitary candle furnished all the light there

was in the room. There was no fire in the stove, though the weather was cold, the snow falling early in that far northern region.

A woman sat holding a baby close to her to give the child some of the warmth from her own body. She was pale and thin, but Steve noted that her eyes lighted up as they fixed themselves upon the face of Olsen.

On a bed lay a girl of some ten years. The child was thin and emaciated, and the Iron Boy saw at once that she was in a high fever.

"Him make strike," announced Olsen, pointing to Steve Rush.

"Madame, are you Mrs. Olsen?" asked the lad.

"Yes, sir," answered the woman in good English. "Who are you?"

"My name is Rush. Your husband has brought me here, for what purpose I do not know."

"He says you are responsible for this terrible strike. Are you?"

"I am not. I have had no more to do with bringing it on than you. I did all I could to prevent it. Your husband is in error. The men have told him untruths about me. If your husband wishes to leave the union and go to work, I will see that he begins work to-morrow. Has he tried?"

"Yes, sir. He has been to the mine nearly every day, but they would not take him."

"Whom did you ask for work?" demanded Steve, turning to Olsen.

"Little captain, Red Rock."

"You mean Mr. Barton, mining captain of the Red Rock Mine?"

Olsen nodded.

"And he would not take you back?"

"Him no take me."

"He will to-morrow," said Steve.

"Oh, if you will do that for my husband, I shall bless you!" exclaimed the woman. "Segunder, this young man is a good man. Surely he could not have brought this terrible thing upon us."

Segunder's face relaxed a little.

"Are you in need of assistance, Mrs. Olsen?"

The woman hesitated. Her pride was battling with her love for her little family.

"Oh, yes, sir; we are. We do not care for ourselves, my husband and myself, but our children! Just look at them!"

"Have you been to the union, Olsen, and asked them to give you money?"

Olsen shrugged his shoulders.

"No help."

"What is the matter with the little girl on the bed there?"

"She has pneumonia."

"Have you had a doctor?"

"Yes; but he would not come again because we had no money to pay him."

"The cur!" muttered Steve under his breath.

"We have not had a thing in the house to eat since yesterday morning, and then there was scarcely a mouthful apiece."

Segunder smote the table a terrible blow with his fist. The baby asleep in its mother's arms awakened and began crying loudly.

"I kill bosses. I kill them!" shouted Olsen in a terrible voice. "I bring you here to kill you. Maybe you lie to me. Then I kill you, anyhow!"

"Segunder, Segunder!" cried the woman aghast. "This young man is going to help you. He is going to give you work. Don't you understand?"

Olsen grabbed Steve by both shoulders, and, pushing him over to the light, peered long and earnestly into the eyes of the Iron Boy. Then the huge Icelander drew a deep breath that seemed to come from his boots.

"You no lie? You speak true? You give me work?"

"To-morrow morning. And I will do more than that. Cheer up, Mrs. Olsen. I am going away now, but I shall be back within an hour.

You shall have a doctor, and you shall have something else. Olsen, you stay here until I return," commanded Rush sternly. "Mrs. Olsen, see to it that he remains in the house."

Steve was out of the place with a bound. He did not walk this time, but started away on a run. He knew where there was a doctor, not far away, and he made straight for the doctor's house.

"There is a sick child in one of the strikers' homes," said the lad, as the doctor opened the door. "I wish you would go and look after the child."

"One of the strikers?"

"Yes."

"Who is it?"

"Olsen—Segunder Olsen."

"Oh! Who will pay me for attending the case?"

Steve gazed at the doctor in amazement.

"You see, these fellows think we doctors can work for nothing. They make all sorts of promises, but when they are out of work they really expect us to not only keep them, but to furnish them medicines and treat them in the bargain. I know the kind. However, I'll go if you say it is all right. I don't want to appear inhuman," added the doctor, half apologetically.

"Never mind, doctor; I couldn't think of al-

lowing you to work for nothing," answered Rush sarcastically. "I know someone who will be glad to do so—a man who has some human sympathy left. Good night."

Steve dashed down the steps and ran to the office of the company doctor.

"Why, certainly I will go. Why did they not send for me?" demanded the physician, after Steve had explained the case.

"I guess they were too much upset to think of it, after another doctor had refused to attend the case. Can you go at once?"

"This very minute, my lad. Are you going that way?"

"Not now. I have something else to attend to, but I shall be there soon. Perhaps I shall see you. Thank you very much."

"No thanks necessary. I am glad you came to me."

"I will see that your fee is paid, sir."

"You will do nothing of the sort. The idea!"

"I knew I'd find a real man," muttered Steve, as he left the house.

He hurried to his boarding house, where he routed out Bob Jarvis.

"You come with me; I want you."

"What, more trouble?" jeered Jarvis.

"Yes, but not for us. There is a family in distress. The family of Olsen, the big Icelander.

They are starving, and one of their children is dying of pneumonia, I believe."

Rush was hurrying down the street, with Bob doing his best to keep up with his companion.

Half an hour later the Iron Boys staggered into the squalid Olsen home under the weight of heavy burdens. Bob Jarvis carried a bag of coal on one shoulder; Steve Rush a huge bundle of kindling wood, with a heavy basket in his right hand.

"Here we are again," he cried cheerily, as the lads dumped their burden to the floor. The doctor was already there, working over the sick girl.

"I must have some hot water, and at once," he said.

"We have no fire, sir," wailed the woman.

"Never mind; we're going to have a fire in two jerks of a lamb's tail," exclaimed Jarvis. "Give me that kindling wood."

Bob was full of importance. He dumped the contents of the bag of coal on the floor while Steve was placing the kindling in the stove. In a moment the kindling was crackling cheerfully in the stove.

Olsen sat blinking in his chair. Events were moving rather too rapidly for his slow-moving brain to follow them, while Mrs. Olsen appeared to be dazed by the sudden turn of events.

Steve had dived into the kitchen, returning with a battered teapot, a frying pan and some other articles.

"Don't put much coal on, Bob, or you'll smother the fire. This is going to be a quick-lunch affair. Where's the forks? Here, Bob; you set the table. Why are you standing there doing nothing?"

Mrs. Olsen suddenly realized that she must do something.

"Let me do it, sir. Such work is not for a man."

"You never mind, Mrs. Olsen; you just 'tend the baby. I never had any experience minding a baby, but I have had in cooking. I've got some of the finest lamb chops here you ever saw, and some other things."

Rush drew from the basket a package of chops. In another package was a liberal quantity of steak, which he intended should carry the family over for another day. The Olsens looked on in dazed surprise as one thing after another was taken from the basket. There were bread, butter, vegetables, coffee, tea, canned meats, canned peaches and lastly a can of condensed milk. Such a display of good things probably never before had gladdened the hearts of the Olsens at one time.

Steve set Bob at work paring and slicing the

potatoes they had brought, while he proceeded to cook the chops and set the water boiling for the coffee. Rush went at the work as if it had been his daily task for years. As a matter of fact, he had gotten the meals at home many times when his mother had been too ill to do the work, or was engaged at other tasks.

"We didn't bring you much coal to-night," said Steve apologetically, "because we could not carry any more. You will receive half a ton in the morning, and that will keep you going until your husband can earn money to buy more."

Mrs. Olsen did not answer, for her emotion was too great for words.

"This child must go to the hospital, if we expect to pull her through," announced the doctor at this juncture.

"All right, doctor; when do you want to take her?" questioned Rush.

"She must go to-night."

"Segunder," said Steve, "we are going to take your little girl to the hospital and make her well. You will let the doctor have her for a few days, won't you?"

Olsen nodded, and his wife, with a half-startled look, rose and, going over to the bed, kissed the feverish face of the sick child.

"You will let her go?" urged Steve.

"I will do whatever you advise."

"That's right," nodded the doctor. "We will have her out safe and sound in a few days."

Steve did not know whether they would or not, but he aided in bringing cheer to all the household that night.

"Now I think we are ready for supper. These chops are done to a turn, and——"

"Here, the kiddie's going to have first shot at the chops!" exclaimed Bob.

Picking up a fork, Jarvis speared a steaming hot chop from the pan, and, running across the room, held it out for the baby in Mrs. Olsen's arms.

The child extended a chubby fist for the hot morsel, whereat its mother uttered a cry of protest and quickly drew the child out of harm's way.

"Mercy! Don't do that! It would kill the little one."

"What, a lamb chop kill anybody? Why, I've eaten hundreds of them, and they have never killed me yet."

"What on earth are you trying to do, Bob?" demanded Steve Rush, turning on his companion.

"Oh, he wants the baby to eat a chop," answered Mrs. Olsen, half laughing, half crying.

"Well, of all the mutton heads!" exclaimed

Steve. "Does the baby drink milk, Mrs. Olsen?"

"Yes, when we have it."

"Oh, that's too bad. But never mind; I'm going out in a few minutes, and I will send in some fresh milk for the little one. Come, now; sit up and have something to eat."

The family gathered at the table. The doctor, in the meantime, had wrapped the child in blankets, and, telling Mrs. Olsen she might call at the company's hospital in the morning to see it, the kind-hearted physician strode out of the house with his little burden. It was but a short distance to the company's hospital, and he believed he would be able to get the child there much more comfortably in his own arms than in the hospital ambulance.

With a gladness in her eyes that had not been seen there for many days Mrs. Olsen seated herself at the table. Segunder had to be fairly pushed there by Steve. Even when the big Icelander had taken his place at the table he did not eat. He sat with his big eyes fixed wonderingly on the face of Steve Rush.

"Now, you are all fixed and we will leave you. I'll send the milk in for the baby as soon as I can find it. I'll get it, even if I have to milk somebody's cow on the sly. Segunder, you come to me at the mine in the morning, and I will see

that you get to work. Good night, all. Come on, Bob.''

All at once Segunder Olsen's face was buried on his arms on the table and his huge frame was shaking with sobs of joy. He understood at last. All that had been so unreal to him for the last hour had now become sudden, sweet realities.

The Iron Boys hastily left the house, and though neither would have admitted it, there was a suspicious moisture in the eyes of each.

CHAPTER XXI

THE ICELANDER ON THE TRAIL

ON the following morning Olsen reported to the mine, as directed by Steve. The latter had made some inquiries and the results had aroused his suspicion. Barton, the mine captain of the Red Rock, denied that Olsen had applied to him for work. He grew suddenly red under Steve's questioning. But Steve had Mr. Penton's authority for putting the Icelander to work, and the big man, after gripping Rush's hand until the boy felt like crying out, went to work with a will.

When Steve went home for lunch he found a note from Miss Cavard in which she wrote:

"You offered to help me relieve some of our poor, suffering people. I am taking you at your word. There is a family in dire distress on Cave Street. Their name is Allison. If you will meet me there to-night at eight o'clock, we will see what can be done for them. I wish to consult with you about some other charitable work, and that is one of the reasons I am asking you to meet me as stated above.

"Sincerely, MARIE CAVARD."

Steve decided that he would go. There was no good reason why he should not, and his heart really ached for the suffering families of the striking miners. If there were anything he could do to relieve their sufferings he would willingly do it. Already no small part of his wages had been devoted to this very work. Bob Jarvis also had contributed liberally to the cause.

Nothing of moment occurred during the day. When evening arrived Rush, dressed in his best, slipped out, not telling his companion where he was going. He found the house of the Allisons without difficulty. Steve knocked and was admitted. The hall in which he found himself was dark, and the house was as silent as if deserted. The lad did not even see any one who might have opened the door.

"Hello, is anybody at home?" he called.

For answer he was struck a sudden and powerful blow. It sent the boy to the floor in a heap, where he lay as one dead.

Unseen hands lifted the unconscious lad from the floor, carried him down a flight of stairs and threw him upon a pile of straw.

Steve was young and strong, and nature reasserted herself in a few moments. He got to his feet unsteadily and began groping about him.

"I—I wonder where I am?" he muttered.

After groping for some time, Rush decided that he must be in a cellar, but he seemed unable to find any way out of the place. There were no stairs, so far as he could determine, and he had no matches to light that he might look about him.

Rush sat down on the pile of straw to think matters over. He understood at once that someone had struck him down in the dark hall, but as to the identity of his assailant he could not make up his mind. He had a pretty clear idea why the attack on him had been made. Yet the more he thought over the matter the more perplexed did he become as to certain features of it.

All at once the thought of the letter he had received from Miss Cavard entered his mind.

"It was a trick!" almost shouted Steve Rush. "She tricked me here for that scoundrel brother of hers. They wanted to get me here, so they could do me up, and they've won. What a fool I was! But I'll outwit them yet. I'll——"

Steve paused as he heard the sound of footsteps over his head.

"Hello, up there!" he shouted.

There was no answer. The boy shouted again and again, but no attention was paid to his shouts. Apparently they had not been heard, although Steve doubted this to be the case.

Once more Rush tried to find some way out of his prison, but, as before, he failed to do so. After what seemed hours of waiting he decided that there was nothing to be gained by exciting himself, so he threw himself down on the heap of straw, and after a time went to sleep. Being young and vigorous, he was not kept awake by his worries.

Steve was awakened in the morning by the sounds of someone shaking a stove on the floor above. He listened, and understood that the people above were preparing breakfast.

Then the lad realized that he was hungry.

"Hello, up there! Pass down some breakfast, even if you won't let me out." Then, in a lower tone: "If anyone comes down here with my breakfast, I'll walk over him and out pretty quick. I smell breakfast, and it seems to be right here. Whew, but it makes me ravenously hungry!"

Steve's foot at that moment kicked against something that he was sure had not been there on the previous night. He stooped over, when all at once his hands came in contact with a tin pan.

Rush investigated with more than ordinary curiosity.

"Meat, as I live! And hot, too! Why, the stuff must have been placed here within a very

short time. And potatoes? Well, I *am* in luck, after all. Evidently my jailers do not intend to starve me to death."

Steve ate with relish, though the meat was tough and the potatoes were not overdone. After he had finished the meal he felt better, though he would have appreciated a wash. He walked back and forth for an hour or so, feeling that he needed the exercise, after which he lay down for another nap.

In the meantime an alarm had been sent out for the Iron Boy. Bob Jarvis was sure that something had happened to his companion, as Steve never had remained away from home over night before. Jarvis reported the absence to the superintendent and a search was made. Late in the afternoon Bob, worried and irritable, met Olsen. To the latter he explained that Steve was missing.

Segunder listened attentively, but without change of expression.

"Where you think he go?" demanded the Icelander, after Bob had finished.

"I'll tell you, Segunder, I believe that man Cavard has had something to do with this affair."

"Huh!" was the only comment made by the giant.

After his day's work had been finished, however, Segunder started off downtown. He walked along with lowered head, gazing suspiciously into every face he met, as though in search of someone. Olsen continued his slow tramping about the village until the supper hour had passed. He had no thought for this. His mind was possessed of a singleness of purpose that would permit of the entrance of no other thought there.

"You know where boss he stay?" demanded Segunder of the secretary of the union, whom he finally met.

"Who do you mean—the superintendent?"

Olsen shook his head.

"Cavard."

"Oh, Cavard, you mean? I left him at Liberty Hall just now. He is attending to some of the union's affairs there. You will find him if you go there. He isn't going home to supper. What do you want? You're a scab! They'll serve you as they did those two scabs Rush and Jarvis, if you go there."

"No throw Segunder out of window," grunted the Icelander.

The information that he had obtained did not seem to elate him. He turned toward the hall, plodding along with lowered head and set, inexpressive countenance.

There was no one to bar his progress up the stairs, and it was well for such that there was none. Segunder was going up to the meeting room regardless of any obstacles that might obstruct his path.

The Icelander strode into the hall where, with head still lowered, he gazed at Cavard with dull, listless eyes. The walking delegate and head of the union was absorbed in a litter of documents on his desk. At first he did not see Olsen, and there was no one else in the room to inform him of the other man's presence.

Finally the big Icelander coughed to attract the other man's attention.

Cavard glanced up; then a scowl overspread his face.

"What do you want here?" demanded the leader, half irritably.

Segunder did not answer.

"I say, what do you want?"

"I want you. I come speak with you."

"Get out of here! I want nothing to do with a scab!"

"I go when get ready."

"You will go now. If you do not move fast enough I will throw you out—yes, I'll throw you downstairs head first, or whichever way you chance to start. Now go!"

Cavard arose to give emphasis to his words.

"Where you put boy?"

"What?"

"Where you put boy?"

"What boy are you talking about?"

"Where you put Segunder's friend Rush?" demanded the big miner, still preserving his stolid expression.

Cavard laughed.

"You must be a fool!" he sneered.

"No, Segunder not fool. You big fool. Where you keep boy?"

"See here, my man; I've heard all I wish to hear from you. I demand that you leave this hall at once. I don't know what you are talking about. I don't know where the boy Rush is. Furthermore, I don't care where he is. If I did know I wouldn't tell you, for it would be none of your business."

Olsen nodded reflectively while digesting the words of the walking delegate.

"Where you put Segunder's friend, Steve Rush?" persisted the big man.

"I have told you once that I do not know where he is," answered Cavard, his face flushing with anger.

"You lie!"

CHAPTER XXII

THE BATTLE OF THE GIANTS

CAVARD uttered a roar and started to spring from the platform on which he had been sitting. In his haste he overturned the table and went sprawling on his face with the table on top of him.

At that moment a crowd of union men came trooping up the stairs with Mike Caldert at their head.

"Hello, what's going on here?" shouted Caldert.

"It's Olsen."

"Scab! Scab!" yelled the miners.

"He's killed the boss! Down him!"

Segunder did not appear to have heard them. His eyes were fixed on the form of the walking delegate, wriggling beneath the table. Cavard released himself, and, leaping to his feet, looked about for the man who had given him the lie.

"Where is the hound? Let me at him. He called me a liar!" shouted the leader.

With a growl the miners surged toward the Icelander, getting between him and Cavard as they did so.

"You scab! Where'll I hit you first?" jeered

Caldert, making a vicious swing at the head of Segunder Olsen.

That was the last conscious moment of Mike for a full half hour. Olsen took a step forward, his long arm shot out and Caldert went to the floor in a heap.

Olsen faced the crowd, his eyes flashing as they had not done in a long time before. With distended nostrils he quietly awaited the rush of the crowd of miners.

"Come on, I vait for you!" growled Olsen.

"Sail in, fellows; we'll down the seal-eater. It was a chance blow that laid Mike out. Go for him!"

The speaker made a leap for Olsen, then went tottering backward with a sledge-hammer blow over his heart.

Still another miner closed in and clinched. Segunder's fists played a terrible tattoo on the man's body, causing the assailant to totter away groaning.

"Come on, you dogs!" bellowed the Icelander, the spirit of battle having by this time taken full possession of him. "I lig you all!"

"Slug him! Slug him all at once!" shouted a voice.

"We can't get near enough. His arms are too long."

Bang!

Segunder received a blow in the side that caused him to writhe with pain. He whirled on his assailant with surprising quickness considering the Icelander's bulk. His ponderous fist smote the other man between the eyes, sending the fellow hurtling clear across the room.

Attracted by the uproar, Bob Jarvis, who had come in search of Olsen, had run up the stairs. His eyes quickly took in the situation. Bob could scarce restrain himself from rushing into the fray. But as yet there appeared no need for him to do so. Segunder was holding his own; in fact, thus far he had the better of the argument.

The enemy backed away and consulted for a few brief seconds, then with one movement they charged the big man. Men went down like nine-pins. The long arms of the Icelander swung wildly but with telling effect. The sound of the blows was heard out in the street. It seldom required more than one blow from those ponderous fists to unfit the man on whom they had landed for further participation in the fight.

"Get into him! Use a club or a knife!" howled a man.

At this juncture Cavard, who had been watching the progress of the fight with pale face and blazing eyes, leaped from the platform and began forcing his way through the crowd.

Cavard was a big and powerful man. He could hit hard and sure, as some of the men there were well aware from personal experience. Segunder saw him coming, and a gleam of savage joy lighted up the eyes of the Icelander.

The Russian walked more slowly as he neared his adversary. The two men eyed each other steadily. All at once the labor leader's right fist shot out with lightning-like speed. It caught Segunder on the side of the head, spinning him about. Before he could catch his balance Cavard was upon him.

Instantly the two men became a whirling, tumbling tangle, arms striking, feet kicking, breath coming in quick, short gasps. First Olsen would be under; then it would be Cavard's turn.

The others in the room had instinctively drawn back when the battle between the two giants commenced.

Cavard loosed his grip on Olsen, endeavoring to get in a telling blow, with which he hoped to put his adversary out. But before he could strike, Segunder's fist was jammed into his face with awful force. The labor leader staggered back with the blood flowing freely.

With a growl of rage Olsen was upon him.

The men clinched and both went to the floor.

But, as they fell, Cavard had managed to slip a revolver from his pocket. It was now his one purpose to bring the weapon into position where he could use it.

"Look out, Segunder—he's got a gun!" shouted Bob Jarvis.

But the Icelander did not need the warning. He had seen the movement and he was now struggling to get possession of the weapon before it could be turned against him. Cavard was on his back, with his cheek pressed tightly against the cheek of his opponent, the Icelander's left hand pinioning Cavard's right hand and the weapon to the floor.

With a sudden powerful upward movement of his body Cavard threw his adversary off and leaped to his feet. In getting up, however, the Russian's weapon was knocked from his hand.

A lithe young figure sprang through the crowd at the instant when the miners, believing their leader was seriously hurt, were making a rush for Olsen.

The figure was Bob Jarvis. Quick as a flash he snatched the revolver from the floor and sprang back again the wall.

"Jarvis! Jarvis! Throw him out of the window. *Kill* the scab!"

Slowly the weapon in the hand of the Iron Boy was raised to a level with the men's heads.

"Stand back, every mother's son of you, or I'll make you look like nutmeg graters!" warned the boy.

The men hesitated, then slowly fell back. They saw that the boy meant exactly what he had said.

"This is going to be a fair fight, and somebody is going to get good and properly pounded. There won't be any foul tactics as long as I've got a grip on this revolver," Jarvis warned the crowd.

The combatants were at each other with a rush. Once more they clinched. The two desperate men swayed from side to side, neither seeming to be able to obtain advantage over the other.

Suddenly the Icelander's arms seemed to relax. He pushed his adversary from him, then with all the force in his powerful body, he concentrated on a swift blow.

The blow smote the labor leader on the side of the jaw.

Cavard struck the floor with terrific force.

With an animal-like roar the Icelander threw himself upon the prostrate body of his antagonist. Olsen, in his terrible rage, had lost all control of himself. He was slow to anger, but when once aroused he was a wild animal.

Gripping the other man's shoulders, he banged

"Come Help Me Get Rush."

him on the hard floor with crushing force. All at once the big, powerful fingers of the Icelander encircled the neck of the labor leader. A look of triumph shone in Olsen's eyes.

"Segunder!"

"It was Bob Jarvis who spoke.

"Segunder, stop! Stop, I tell you!"

But the man was past heeding even if he heard.

Still keeping the others covered with his weapon, Bob Jarvis sprang forward, gripping Olsen by the shoulder.

"Segunder! Segunder!" he shouted in the ear of his friend. "Stop! Stop, I tell you. You will kill him! You've won. Let go of him, I tell you!"

The Icelander gazed up blankly at the boy bending over him; then he turned once more to his punishment of the man beneath him.

Bob tugged to pull him off, but he might as well have tried to move one of the mountains of iron on the range.

Something must be done, and that quickly. Bob's mind worked with more rapidity than it ever had worked before.

"I hate to do so, but I've got to do it," he muttered.

With that he drew back and struck Olsen two swift blows on the side of the head. Jarvis'

punch was no light thing. Olsen toppled from the body of his victim and rolled over on the floor.

The miners started to pounce upon him.

"Stand back!" shouted Bob. "I'll shoot the first man who makes a move!"

Olsen was struggling to get up. Bob was beside him in an instant.

"Pull Cavard away!" commanded the lad.

No one made a move to do so. Jarvis dragged the unconscious leader to one side, then sprang back to Olsen. who was pulling himself together,

"Olsen! Segunder! I hit you. I had to do it, or you would have killed him. Come with me. Come *now!* You've whipped him. He won't do any more fighting for a while, I'll wager. Come, now—that's a good fellow."

Bob began tugging at the Icelander's arm. Olsen gave ground slowly, his eyes fixed on the figure stretched out on the floor. The boy continued to urge the big Icelander. A happy thought suddenly occurred to him.

"Come help me get Rush. I think I know where he is. They've got him locked up somewhere."

The words acted like magic on Olsen.

"Rush, Rush, Rush?" he questioned dully.

"Yes, yes! I came for you. Come with me!" appealed Bob Jarvis.

Segunder grabbed the Iron Boy, dragging him down the stairs two steps at a jump.

"Where Rush, where Rush?" he demanded savagely as they reached the street.

"I have just seen Cavard's sister. She said Steve was to have met her at the Allison's last night, but that she had not been able to keep the appointment. After thinking it over, the young woman began to think there was something strange about the affair, and she hunted me up at once, knowing that Steve had been missing all day."

Segunder was off, swinging into his long stride, with Bob Jarvis running along by his side.

They reached the Allison home a few minutes later. Bob knocked, but there was no response. He tried the door and found it locked.

"Hello, in there!" shouted the lad. "I believe they are not at home. What shall we do?"

Olsen knew what to do. He was not to be deterred by a little thing like a locked door. Backing off, he threw his whole great weight against the offending barrier.

The door burst in with a loud crash.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE HERO OF THE BRIDGE

OLSEN leaped in through the opening, kicking the pieces of the wrecked door that interfered with his passage from his path.

Bob darted by him. They ran into the front room, which, in this instance, was the parlor, but found it vacant. Next Jarvis dived into the dining room.

Allison, a heavy-jowled, powerful man, was standing at bay behind the dining-room table. His family were nowhere in sight. The place was squalid and poverty was in evidence everywhere.

"We are looking for Steve Rush. Where is he?" announced Bob.

"Get out of my house! I'll have you both sent to jail, you scoundrels!" raged Allison.

"I tell you, Rush came to your house last night, and he has not been seen since. We want him; we want him quick! It will be the worse for you if you don't produce him or tell us where we shall find him."

"I don't know anything about your fool friend. I——"

Bob had the miner by the throat. Allison hurled him aside, grabbing up a chair as he did so.

Olsen uttered a yell and charged the miner. The latter made a pass at the Icelander with the heavy dining-room chair. Segunder wrenched it from his hands. Then he brought the offending chair down on the floor with a terrific crash, smashing it into kindling wood.

"I want boy Rush!" he demanded.

"You get out of my house, or I'll bore you full of holes!" yelled the miner, at the same time whipping out a knife.

With a well-directed kick Segunder sent the table between them crashing to one side. With a leap he landed upon Allison, smiting him a powerful blow on the side of the head. Allison went down as a matter of course.

Olsen calmly stooped over, picked the fellow up and threw him out of the window, Allison carrying the frame and the glass with him.

"He one bad man," grinned the Icelander. "I smash house down."

Olsen began to destroy the furniture, what there was of it, until Jarvis restrained him.

"Don't do that, Segunder. We want to find Steve. I believe he is here somewhere. Hark—what's that?"

Olsen listened.

"I heard someone calling, Segunder."

"Hello!"

The voice sounded faint and far away.

"Is that you, Steve?"

"Yes."

"Where are you?"

"I am here."

"Where is here?"

"Down cellar. I can't get out. I think there must be a trap somewhere, if you can find it."

"We'll find it. Olsen, he's down below us. If we don't find the cellar opening I'll let you try your hand at breaking a hole in the floor," proposed Bob.

Both began searching for the opening. Bob found it, but there was no ring in the trap and Olsen solved the problem of getting the place open by kicking a hole in the trap, then finally demolishing it altogether.

"Where's the stairs?" cried Jarvis.

"Pull stairs up," answered the Icelander.

Sure enough, such was the case. A short flight of clumsily constructed stairs had been pulled up to the floor and secured by a rope that ran off to another part of the cellar. Upon investigation they found that this rope led up to another trap in the dining room, from where the food that Steve had found must in all probability have been lowered.

Olsen did not wait for the stairs to be lowered but squeezed down into the hole, dropping to the cellar bottom. Steve ran to him and the big fellow hugged the boy delightedly.

"I get. I smash big boss."

"What does he mean, Bob?"

"He means that he gave Cavard an awful beating. But it was a dandy fight, Steve. How I wish you could have seen it!"

Steve Rush heard all about the events that had occurred since he had been taken prisoner the night before. In turn he related what had happened to himself. There was no direct evidence by which they could connect Cavard with Rush's capture, but the circumstantial evidence was strong. Later in the day Steve went to see the superintendent, and the two had a long talk.

Nothing of moment occurred for several days after that. Cavard did not appear on the street for nearly a week after the battle, though his lieutenants were in conference with him at his home every day. The leader had had a beating that he was not likely to forget during the rest of his life. His rage was deep and murderous, and as he paced the floor of his room he swore vengeance on the Iron Boys as well as on Segunder Olsen.

An extremely cold winter was setting in. It was developing into one of the most severe sea-

sons ever known on the iron range, and the suffering of the families of the miners who were out of work had reached a serious stage.

The miners themselves were growing bitter against the bosses and more turbulent. It had come to a point where it was not safe for a non-union man to appear upon the street. He was in danger of his life if he did so.

Steve believed that the men's turbulence was as much due to the subtle influence of Cavard as because of their families' sufferings. The armed guard about the mine shafts had been trebled, as it was feared that the strikers might wreck some of the company's property. What seemed to enrage the men more than ever was the sight of the long trains of cars that were carrying the ore from the dump pile and transferring it to the furnaces in Ohio and in the east. The lakes being frozen over, the ore was conveyed all the way to the mills by rail, as is always the case in the winter.

Matters were approaching a crisis, as the officials of the mining company well realized. Mr. Penton believed, however, that he had enough loyal men to hold the others in check and to protect the company's property. Steve took a different view of the matter, but he said nothing, as it was not fitting for him to suggest what should and what should not be done.

Since the boy's capture he had set himself upon Cavard's trail with the firm purpose of running the man down and exposing his perfidity. He knew a weak spot would sooner or later develop in the leader's defence, and when it did develop Steve Rush proposed to be on hand to break through the defence at that particular point.

As soon as Cavard was able to be out he began meeting the men at the hall, encouraging them and goading them on in his subtle way by pointing out that the sufferings of their families were due to the grasping avarice of the bosses. A day or so after he got out Cavard made a trip to the Blair, an independent mine some ten miles up the valley. There he spent the day and part of the night.

Steve did not learn of this until late in the evening. The information caused him to wonder what was going on up the valley. He had no doubt that something would develop from that visit.

"I ought to go up there and find out what is going on," he confided to Bob.

"Why don't you?"

"I cannot leave here. Every loyal man is needed right here every minute of the day and night. There is no telling at what moment trouble will break loose, and when it comes it

is going to come thick and fast, if I am any judge of men. The miners are getting desperate. They are going to break out, and with our handful of helpers we shall be powerless to stem the tide."

"I reckon you're right. When do you think it is coming?"

"It is likely to occur at any minute now—to-night, to-morrow, any time. I believe it is a part of Cavard's game to have something like that occur."

"I wish I'd let Segunder finish the fellow while he was about it. He would have killed the leader in a minute more."

"Bob, how *can* you say such a thing?" chided Rush.

"Yes; I suppose it is rather a strong statement, but I don't love that man Cavard one little bit."

"Neither do I, but that is no excuse for wanting to see him killed. We will beat him at his own game, and with his own weapons if we can. If not the company will have to get out of its present situation as best it can."

"I guess that will be the answer."

On the following day Steve set an inquiry going in another direction, having enlisted the services of a man whom he and Bob had sent for from the city at their own expense. This

man belonged to a private detective agency, and Steve had known him before coming to the mines.

There was a long conference, that night, at the house of one of the loyal miners, where the detective, Steve and Bob had gone that they might not be observed. To have met in the boarding house would have been to arouse suspicion, for the strikers had spies in every place of the sort. Cavard saw to it that he was kept well-posted as to all that was going on.

The conference broke up at a late hour and the boys made their way home through back yards and across open lots in order to avoid meeting with strikers. It was not that they were afraid, but they were acting the part of prudence. They had set out to achieve by their own efforts what the company, with all its resources and money, had not been able to accomplish, and that was to break the backbone of the strike.

It was a giant's task, it seemed, for two youngsters to attempt, but the Iron Boys were determined that it should be done.

The next day dawned raw and blustering. The weather, however, did not keep the strikers within doors. Groups were gathered on every corner, where, while stamping about to keep from freezing, they discussed the situation.

Shortly before noon there was a meeting at Liberty Hall. Of course the Iron Boys were not present.

When the men came away from that meeting a change had stolen over them. They had ceased their noisy threats. Their faces were sullen and their words were few.

"Look out for trouble!" nodded Steve, as he observed the men from the window of a house across the way.

"Yes; they are loaded for bear," agreed Bob.

"Something has stirred them up. Probably Cavard has been talking to them. That man is a fiend in human form. He handles them, makes them his playthings, all to serve his own selfish purposes."

The boys came up with Mr. Penton, who was on his way to the mines from his office. Steve stepped up to him, touching his hat.

"How are you, boys? I have just closed down the shafts for the rest of the day. I don't like the looks of things."

"Neither do I, sir," answered Steve.

"What is it that you have observed?" questioned the superintendent.

"The men are loaded for trouble. Practically we are standing in a drift ready to be fired, and when the powder goes off the roof of the drift is likely to fall down on our heads and finish us."

"You are right, Rush. I have found your advice good. What would you do to cope with the situation, were you the superintendent?"

The superintendent's eyes twinkled.

"What would I do? Why, I'd take the situation by the nape of the neck and shake all the fight out of it. In the first place, if I did not have enough men to give the strikers all the fight they wanted, I would ask the authorities for protection. I believe our property will be destroyed if you don't place guards about the mines."

"I am glad to hear you say what you have said," nodded Mr. Penton. "I have urged the sheriff to wire the governor to rush a company of militia here, and the mining company has backed me up in the request. I dislike to do it, but I must protect our property. I presume it will excite the men to violence, and——"

"The men cannot be much more excited than they already are, sir. Cavard has worked them up to the exploding point. With an honest man at its head, a miner's union might be made of real benefit to the men. It's too bad that they have fallen into the hands of Cavard."

The boys went on up the street to their boarding house to dinner. There was little conversation at the meal, for every man felt that the calm before the storm was upon them.

Shortly after one o'clock the men began strolling toward the "ore bridge." This was a structure of steel and concrete that the company had erected across a mountain gorge, and over which the ore was carried by train to the lakes. The ore bridge was the key to the situation. Without it no ore could be shipped from either the Cousin Jack or the Red Rock Mines.

By two o'clock there were more than a thousand men gathered in the vicinity of the bridge. They seemed impervious to the biting cold of the winter's day. It was not apparent that the men had any particular purpose in gathering about the bridge, but there was little doubt that their leader had put the thought in their minds at the noonday meeting, whether or not they realized that fact.

Suddenly the men set up a cheer. Cavard, muffled to the ears in an expensive fur coat, was seen approaching. He was shaking hands with the men right and left as he strolled on toward the bridge.

The men began cheering. Somehow Cavard's appearance seemed to exert a strange influence over the miners. His sway over them was absolute.

They began to shout for him to talk to them. Half a dozen men hoisted him to a stump. The leader waved his cap.

"Men, you are making a noble fight!" he shouted. "You will yet down the bosses and make them come to your terms. We've got them on the run already. Their feet are on your necks and on the necks of your families, but you will throw the weight off, and when you do, there will be a terrible retribution. And what a little thing stands between you and that retribution. For instance, men, that bridge there is the key to the ore output. That represents the bosses. Of course we cannot interfere with their property, but that structure of steel and cement was made possible by the sweat of your brows. It was you who mined the ore for the steel from which the bridge was constructed. It was you who made its building a possibility. And now it rises up as if to mock you. Do not misunderstand me; I warn you against violence, but there are limits to man's endurance, especially if that man have dependent upon him a wife and children."

A low murmur ran over the assemblage. The murmur increased in volume until it became a roar.

"Men, men; I beg of you to be calm!" shouted Cavard.

"The bridge! The bridge!" thundered the multitude.

"Down with the bridge!"

"Down with the bosses!"

The mob surged toward the structure as one man.

"Dynamite! Get dynamite. We'll blow it up! We'll teach the bosses a lesson that they won't forget!"

Half a dozen men had started away on a run. After a time, amid the clamor and the shouting, these same six miners were seen crawling up the ravine toward the bridge itself.

"Look! Look!"

The men above had seen them.

"They're going to dynamite the bridge!"

It was true. The great structure that meant so much to the mining company seemed doomed to destruction. The ground fairly shook with the roar that arose when those above discovered the purpose of their fellows. Cavard had disappeared.

At that moment a lad dashed through the mob and out on to the bridge, running along the ties a hundred feet in the air.

"Stop! Back, every man of you!" he shouted. "It will be prison for years for every man who has a hand in this affair! Call them off! Stop them while there is still time!"

"Get off the bridge, unless you want to be blown to kingdom come!" roared the crowd.

"Let him blow up! It's what he deserves."

"If you destroy the bridge I shall go with it. That will be murder. Those men down there will be hanged for my death. Now, will you call them off?"

The mob hesitated.

"*No!*"

Every man of the hundreds took up the cry. Steve Rush stood calmly on the bridge, his attention divided between the men creeping up the ravine and the mob on the surface. He held a piece of railroad iron in his hands, but this was the only weapon he had for his own defence, in case the men should decide to rush upon him from the end of the structure.

The dynamiters were nearing the danger spot. Just then a woman fairly flew down the short incline that led to the bridge. She did not stop, but dashed full speed out to the bridge. Reaching it, she ran with all speed to where Steve Rush was standing, exhorting the crowd and pleading and threatening.

"Miss Cavard!" he gasped. "You must not stay here. Run for your life. Don't you see what the men are going to do?"

"Yes, I'll run, but I would rather stay. Here!"

She thrust something toward Steve—something that she had been carrying concealed under her long, black coat. Steve uttered an

exclamation of joy. It was a rifle. Passing it quickly to him with a box of cartridges, the girl sped on across the bridge to the opposite side.

None had seen the rifle change hands. Steve waited until she had reached a place of safety; then he stooped over and pretended to pick the weapon up from the track. This time he made no effort to conceal it.

"He's got a gun!" roared the miners.

"Yes, and I'm going to use it," shouted the boy. "Call off your dynamiters!"

"Hurry! Fire the powder!" was the answer of the strikers.

Rush stepped to the edge of the bridge and looked down. The men were attaching the fuses to the sticks of dynamite as they ran.

Steve raised the rifle, took careful aim and fired. The foremost man dropped his dangerous burden and uttered a yell. A ball had passed through his arm.

"Back, you hounds; or I'll riddle every man of you."

Once more the rifle spoke, but the bullet missed its mark. It had the effect of stopping the man who was trying to reach the bridge to plant the explosive and touch off the fuse.

The dynamiters backed off. They had not bargained for this. The men on the surface made a hostile movement toward Steve, where-

upon he threw the muzzle of the rifle about, covering them.

"Come on; come on, if you want some of the same medicine!" he cried.

Bang!

A yell floated up from the mountain gorge. The Iron Boy had fired just in time to head off another man of that little party below. Now he kept menacing them with his weapon. Now and then he would send a shot close to them when he thought they were getting ready for another charge. This continued for fully half an hour, when the dynamiters drew back for a consultation. A man was sent to the surface to urge the miners to rush the bridge and throw the boy over. But the strikers up there had no mind to face his ready weapon at short range. Jeers, howls and cat-calls were hurled at the plucky boy who stood there in that wind-swept spot a hundred feet in the air with the temperature below zero, unmindful of taunts, but alert and watchful.

Five o'clock came, and he was still there. It was getting dark. A few minutes more and it would be so dark that the men below would have plenty of opportunity to carry out their desperate plan. Steve had six cartridges left in his magazine chamber.

He waited and watched. At last he could no

longer see the bottom of the gorge. Aiming his weapon as nearly as he could judge at the spot where he had last seen the dynamiters, he began shooting at intervals, varying his aim somewhat with each shot. He hoped to hold them off.

One more shell was left in the gun. Steve was making his last stand. It would be a matter of but a short time now before they would have accomplished their purpose.

Suddenly a shout rent the air. There was a new note in it. It was not a shout of triumph, but of anger and alarm. The boy on the bridge did not understand it.

"Run for it. It's the soldiers!" was the shout that was suddenly taken up and passed from lip to lip.

"Hurrah!" shouted the lad.

But he had not finished yet. He turned the rifle down into the dark gorge and pulled the trigger again. Whether he had hit anything or not he did not know.

"Look out for the soldiers!" bellowed a man, leaning over the edge of the precipice. "Run for it!"

Steve was bounding toward the end of the bridge.

The soldiers and the sheriff's deputies were coming up at a dog trot.

"Shell the gorge down there. They're trying to dynamite the bridge!" Rush yelled.

A moment more and a volley of bullets from the rifles of the guardsmen raked the depths of the gorge with a hot fire.

The bridge was saved.

CHAPTER XXIV

CONCLUSION

A GREAT mob was packed in Liberty Hall later in the evening. There were no mutterings. The men were sullen and discouraged. Outside the hall was a platoon of guardsmen ready to fall in for whatever services might be demanded of them. The spirit of the striking men seemed to have been broken.

Three of the six who had gone down to plant the dynamite under the bridge had been killed by the fire of the guardsmen. Every shaft was guarded by armed men, with orders to shoot any man who approached the shaft after dark. The company was prepared to keep the siege up all winter if necessary, though they promised that, were the miners to throw out their leader and elect an honest man, the company might treat with them, looking toward a settlement.

The chairman rose. His face was solemn, but his eyes belied the solemnity of his face.

"My friends," he began, "the bosses have triumphed over us to-day, but we shall down them yet. I have a piece of news for you showing the trickery to which they have resorted. The men of the Blair Mine have gone back to

work. The bosses have done this to tantalize you."

None thought how inconsistent this was. The men began to grow noisy and restless after this announcement.

"How do they go back?" shouted a voice.

"At the old terms," answered the chairman. "They gave it up."

"We'll keep it up! We won't give up till we starve!"

"No; down with the bosses! We should get guns and drive these troops, these hirelings, from the range. Arm yourselves, men, and assert your manhood!" cried another voice, that of one of the leader's lieutenants, though he made certain that only a few of those about him observed whence the words came.

Steve Rush and Bob Jarvis rose from the corner of the room near the stairway unobserved. Steve jumped up on a window-sill, waving his hat to attract their attention.

"Men, men! Listen to me!"

There was a sullen roar when the miners discovered who it was, and the mob rose to its feet, surging toward Steve.

"Stay where you are if you value your lives. There are fifty rifles trained on this hall at this moment. The guardsmen will riddle you with bullets if you make a hostile move toward me."

The men hesitated.

"I am your friend, though you do not believe it. I will prove to you that I am. Listen to me, boys. Listen! That man," pointing to Cavard, "is a scoundrel. It is he who has led you on to this terrible strike. It is he who is to blame for the suffering of your families. I tell you I know this. I could prove it to you, but there are other things that you must know first."

"Speak out. We'll hear you," cried a voice.

"I am going to do so. Your leader has just told you, almost shedding tears as he did so, that the Blair Mine had resumed operations. But there was something else that he did not tell you. He did not tell you that he had had a conference with the owners of the mine, and that they had made a deal with him. Money is what Cavard has been working for—money and power. He's got the money now, and he doesn't care what becomes of you——"

"It's a lie!" shrieked the man Cavard.

"It is the truth. Men, Cavard was paid fifteen thousand dollars by an official of the Blair mine last night to call off the strike. I could give you the official's name. That fifteen thousand dollars was deposited in the bank here to-day. It is here, all here. I have the proofs. He is a traitor! He has sold you out at the ex-

pense of your families. Now, what are you going to do about it?"

With a howl of rage the men turned to the place where Cavard had been standing. But the man was gone. He had slunk out under cover of Steve Rush's thrilling speech never to be seen in the mining village again. Steve had seen him go, but had not tried to detain him.

"What shall we do?" cried the men, when they discovered that their prey had escaped them.

"Call the strike off, here and now, and go to work. After all has quieted down again, reorganize your union if you wish, and put honest men at the head of it. I shall be with you heart and soul, if you are willing to do as I have suggested."

There was a moment of silence.

"Rush! Rush! Three cheers for the gamest, squarest boy on the iron range!" shouted a miner excitedly, as he sprang to a seat, waving his arms.

The audience rose as one man, and the building fairly trembled under their roars. They rushed toward the Iron Boys. Bob was caught in the crush and pushed half way down the stairs. But the men were not going to leave just yet. They were enthusiastically shouting the name of Rush.

Steve was caught up. His hat was lost, his coat was nearly ripped from his shoulders, and he was borne in triumph to the rostrum, where they tossed him up into the president's chair.

"You're the next president of the miners' union," they howled.

Steve raised a protesting hand.

"No, boys; you must choose an older man than I. You need level heads here. Besides, I may not be with you next year, but while I am here I shall work for your good. Good luck, boys! To-morrow you will go to work, and there will be happiness in your homes on Christmas Day.

The men had seated themselves again. But as Steve finished speaking a giant figure rose up directly in front of the platform.

It was Segunder Olsen.

"Whoop! Y-e-o-w!" howled the giant.

The strike was ended. As soon as Steve could get away he hurried to his room and went to bed. But his eyes were bright and his heart was full of happiness.

On the following day he was summoned to the main office of the company, with his companion. Each lad was handed a bank book by the president, after the latter had expressed his appreciation of their splendid work. The bank books showed that Steve Rush and Bob Jarvis had a

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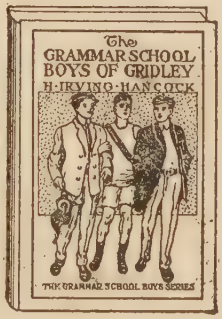

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